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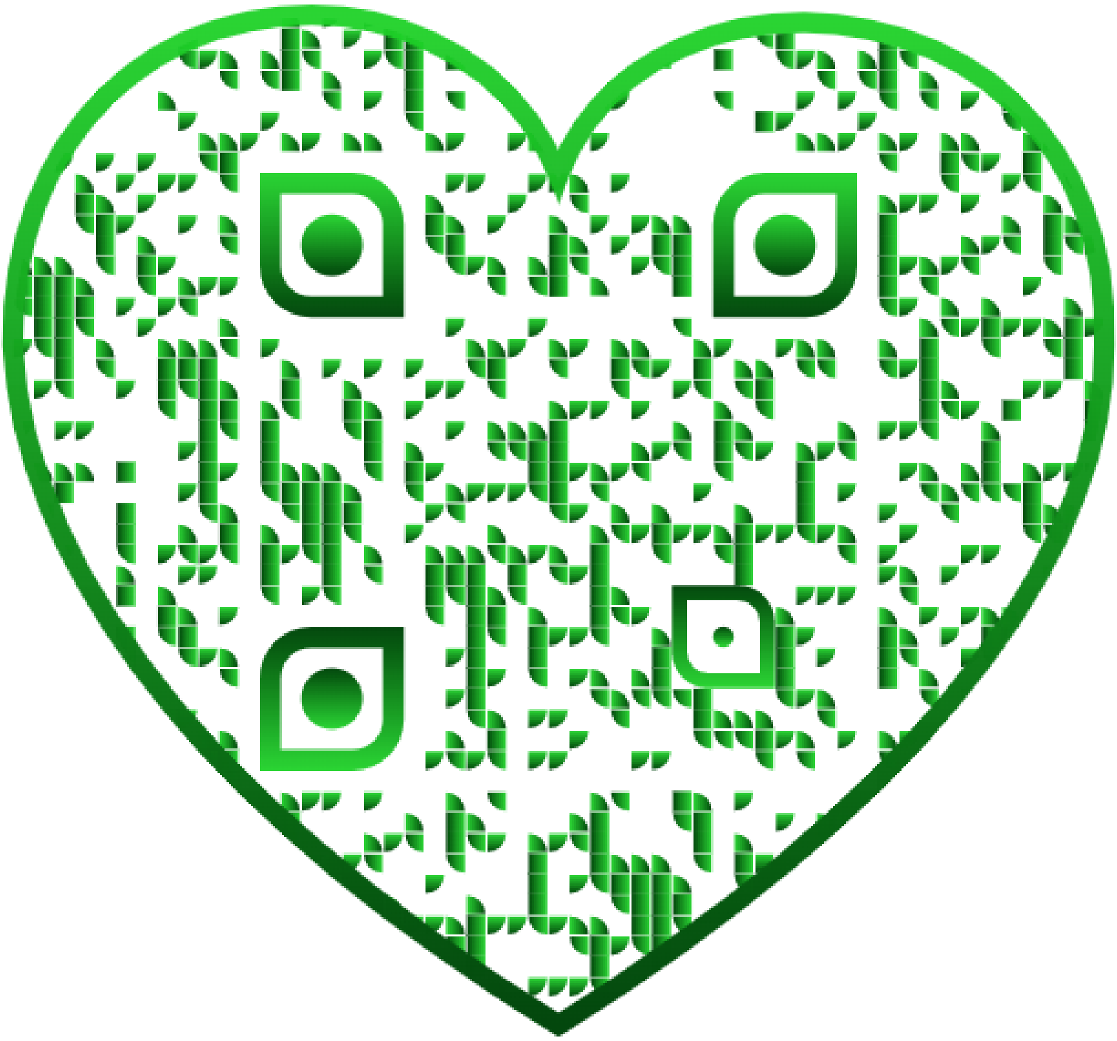

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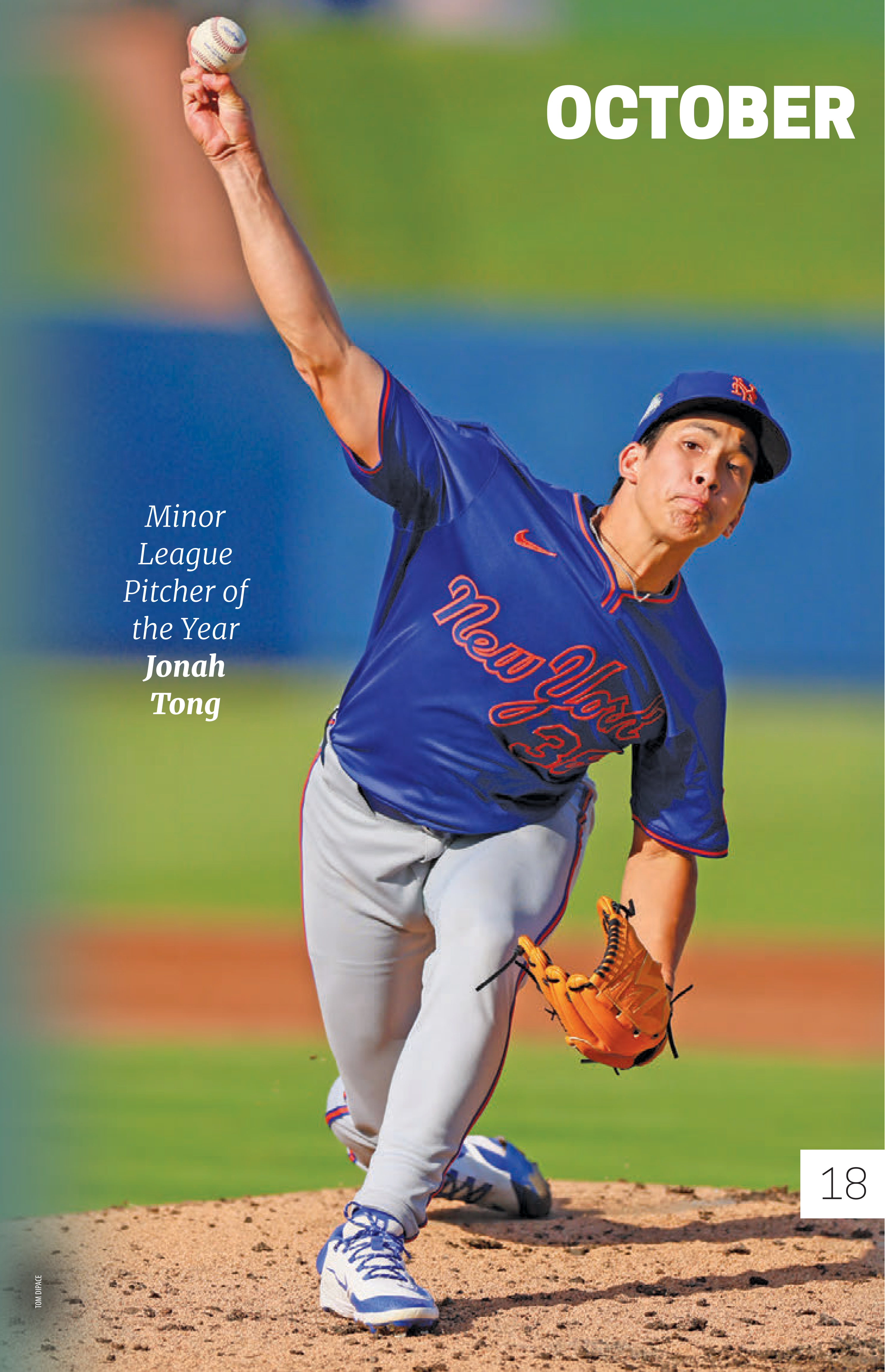
OCTOBER



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ON THE COVER

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COVER PHOTO BY
EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

MAILBAG

*Every month at BaseballAmerica.com, subscribers get exclusive access to BA writers to ask any question they want. Below are recent **BA Mailbag** excerpts.*

The Yankees have been cautious with Henry Lalane. How has he actually looked coming back from two years of injuries? Is his velocity still down?

Yes, Lalane's velocity does appear to still be down. The 21-year-old lefthander averaged roughly 92 mph his last start for Low-A Tampa and touched a tick hotter. The time before that, he averaged 89 and touched 91. So, progress from start to start but a long way from the form he showed before the injury.

—Josh Norris

Davidson

Bo Davidson popped up in the Top 100 Prospects seemingly out of nowhere. What is a realistic outcome?

I wouldn't say he popped onto the T100 out of nowhere. He had an outstanding season for High-A Eugene and has shown flashes of the same potential at Double-A. He definitely has five-tool upside and is one of the better prospects in an improving Giants system. Realistically, he's maybe a power-over-hit guy with value in the outfield and on the bases as well.

—Josh Norris

As of right now, where do you see Jimmy Crooks beginning the 2026 season?

He might be the Cardinals' starting catcher.

—Geoff Pontes

Reds outfielder Hector Rodriguez proved his aggressive approach works in the higher levels of the minors . . . Does it work in MLB?

That's a big if. He does have plus bat-to-ball skills and plus raw power. His approach is hyper-aggressive, but he rarely misses a mistake over the plate. A bigger concern for me is that his hitting angles are fringe. If he's not able to consistently find barrels and pull the ball hard in the air, it leaves his production up to wild swings.

—Geoff Pontes

*The **BA Mailbag** is a subscriber exclusive. Send your question at **BaseballAmerica.com***

ON DECK FOR NOVEMBER: *We rank the Top 10 Prospects in all 15 National League organizations, headlined by a trio of shortstops: the Pirates' Konnor Griffin, the Brewers' Jesús Made and the Cardinals' JJ Wetherholt.*

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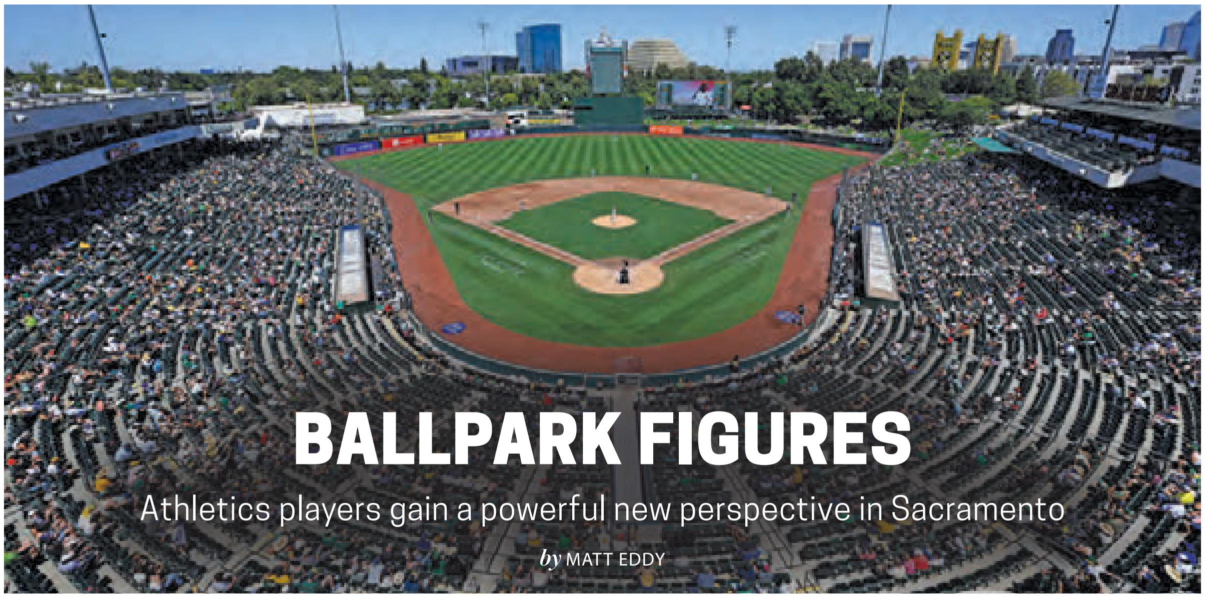
First Pitch

MAKING SENSE OF SOMETIMES DENSE ANALYTICS IN BASEBALL



EAKIN HOWARD/GETTY IMAGES

BALLPARK FIGURES

Athletics players gain a powerful new perspective in Sacramento

by MATT EDDY

When the Athletics announced that they would be leaving Oakland to play their home games in Sacramento for the 2025 through 2027 seasons, it represented a clear downgrade for players.

A's players, coaches and club personnel had to uproot their lives in the Bay Area to move 80-some miles inland to play at Sutter Health Park, a minor league facility that would still be hosting Triple-A Sacramento River Cats games when the A's were on the road.

The River Cats are a Giants affiliate. They have played all their home games at Sutter Health this season, though they lost six home dates due to scheduling conflicts with the A's.

While the Athletics in Sacramento situation created chaos, it also created an ideal scenario to see how a Triple-A park would play when used as an MLB facility for an entire season.

Would adding major league talent to a minor league park change the park's character? How would the Athletics' new home compare to the Oakland Coliseum, where they had played since moving to the West Coast in 1968.

Note: All data presented here is generated from home games only, counting the batting and pitching statistics at the venue.

ATHLETICS HOME GAMES: NOW VS. THEN

Let's address the most basic question: How does the run environment in home games look for the Athletics in Sacramento this season compared with how it looked at the Oakland Coliseum in 2024?

Year Venue	R/G	HR/G	OPS	ISO	BABIP	wOBA
2025 Sacramento (MLB)	9.77	2.76	.779	.186	.305	.335
2024 Oakland (MLB)	8.67	1.93	.695	.142	.291	.302

Athletics home games in Sacramento this year feature more than one additional run per game, 0.8 additional home runs per game, as well as large spikes in OPS (84 points), isolated slugging (44 points), BABIP (14 points) and wOBA (33 points) compared with A's home games last year in Oakland.

In other words, the difference in home park status is dramatic for players accustomed to the Oakland Coliseum.

SUTTER HEALTH: BIG LEAGUERS VS. TRIPLE-A PLAYERS

Sacramento's Sutter Health Park has operated at Triple-A in the Pacific Coast League since 2000. It has a reputation for being a neutral or perhaps even pitcher-friendly venue in the high-scoring PCL.

Many PCL teams play at altitude, which aids ball flight, especially in conjunction with the livelier major league ball that has been used at Triple-A since 2019. Many ballparks built at elevation have large outfield dimensions, forcing outfielders to play deep and allowing for a greater number of hits to fall in front of them. Some PCL parks also have surfaces that play fast because of hot, dry conditions.

Sacramento was an exception when compared with other PCL parks. It saw about 25% fewer runs scored and home runs in home games compared with road games for the years 2022 through 2024.

But that data was compiled by Triple-A players. How would Sutter Health play with big leaguers making pitches, taking swings, running bases and fielding balls in play?

Let's take a look at Sacramento data from this season, both by the A's and Triple-A River Cats and compare it with a Sutter Health Triple-A baseline from 2022 to 2024.

Year Venue	R/G	HR/G	OPS	ISO	BABIP	wOBA
2025 Sacramento (MLB)	9.77	2.76	.779	.186	.305	.335
2025 Sacramento (AAA)	9.67	2.17	.737	.161	.306	.321
3YR Sacramento (AAA)	9.12	2.06	.727	.153	.299	.323

Power production is generally the biggest difference between levels of the minor leagues and between the minors and majors overall. That holds true in this comparison of big leaguers and minor leaguers in Sacramento home games.

Home games in Sacramento this year saw one additional home run every two games when used as an MLB facility compared to Triple-A games. The OPS climbed by about 40 points and the isolated slugging by 25 points when the big leaguers—and not Triple-A hitters—use Sutter Health.

The park also saw slightly more power in Triple-A games this year when compared with the 2022 to 2024 baseline. This could be a blip created by weather patterns or structural changes to the facility—or possibly to other factors related to Sutter Health's constant use, such as wear patterns on the mound, infield surface or outfield grass.

Keep in mind that virtually all baseball facilities receive regular "rest" periods in between homestands. Exceptions include Sacramento and Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter, Fla., which hosts both the Jupiter and Palm Beach clubs in the Florida State League. ■

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From Phenom To The Farm

FORMER BALLPLAYERS REFLECT ON PRO SUCCESS AND FAILURE

FOR LOVE OF THE GAME

Joba Chamberlain's atypical baseball journey had a typical beginning

by **KYLE BANDUJO**

Former Yankees righthander Joba Chamberlain might never have been the best pitcher in baseball, but he's almost certainly the only one to have appeared on the TV shows "Man v. Food" and "Gossip Girl."

"There's always some weird things that happen when you get involved with the Yankees," Chamberlain said.

Chamberlain's rise to MLB was atypical. Far from a prodigy, he played primarily first base as a senior at Lincoln Northeast High in Nebraska. He had few prospects to play college ball.

"You would've looked at me and said, 'He's too fat. He's too slow. His spin rate's not good enough. He hasn't pitched enough,'" Chamberlain said. "But I hated to lose—I competed—and you can't put a number on that."

JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES

Righthander Joba Chamberlain shined as a Yankees callup in 2007 and entered the following season ranked as the No. 3 prospect in baseball.

That passion for baseball came from his father Harlan, who was a sports fanatic. Despite being paralyzed on the left side of his body due to polio contracted as a child, Harlan did everything within his power to provide Joba with an outlet to practice the game they both cherished.

"Still played catch—he'd sit in his chair," Chamberlain said of his father. "I think that's what made me good at throwing. I was a little short, fat kid, so I didn't want to run very much when I was younger, so I had to make sure I threw it to my dad, because it wasn't like he was getting up to get the ball."

After high school, Chamberlain enrolled at Division II Nebraska-Kearney. Participating for the first time in a strength and conditioning program, he quickly improved and made the Lopers' rotation as a freshman. While his 5.23 ERA didn't jump off the page, his rapidly accelerating velocity did. He hit 101 mph that season.

Chamberlain transferred to Nebraska for his sophomore season in 2005 and pitched the Cornhuskers to their first-ever College World Series win. That helped set him up to be a top pick in the 2006 draft, but a poorly timed rumor about his surgically repaired knee dropped him to the Yankees at No. 41 overall.

Chamberlain flew through the minors before debuting on Aug. 7, 2007. He started his career with 16 consecutive scoreless innings in relief.

Playing for the Yankees turned Chamberlain's rise into a media frenzy. Local reporters obsessed over the Yankees' usage plans—dubbed the "Joba Rules"—along with his electric arsenal and animated nature on the mound.

Chamberlain's ensuing six years in the Bronx were a roller coaster. He moved between the bullpen and rotation as he searched for consistency with his health, performance and role.

After making 43 starts between 2008 and '09, Chamberlain became a full-time reliever in 2010, but Tommy John surgery in August 2011 interrupted his trajectory.

Chamberlain pitched in 10 MLB seasons for the Yankees, Tigers, Royals and Indians. He recorded a 3.81 ERA and 1.38 WHIP with 546 strikeouts in 555.1 innings.

He retired in 2017, at peace with the journey that began decades earlier in Nebraska.

"I got to play baseball," Chamberlain said. "I got to do something I've loved my entire life." ■

LISTEN NOW!

Scan the QR code to listen to Joba Chamberlain on the "From Phenom To The Farm" podcast

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Trap Toon *by* PAUL TRAP

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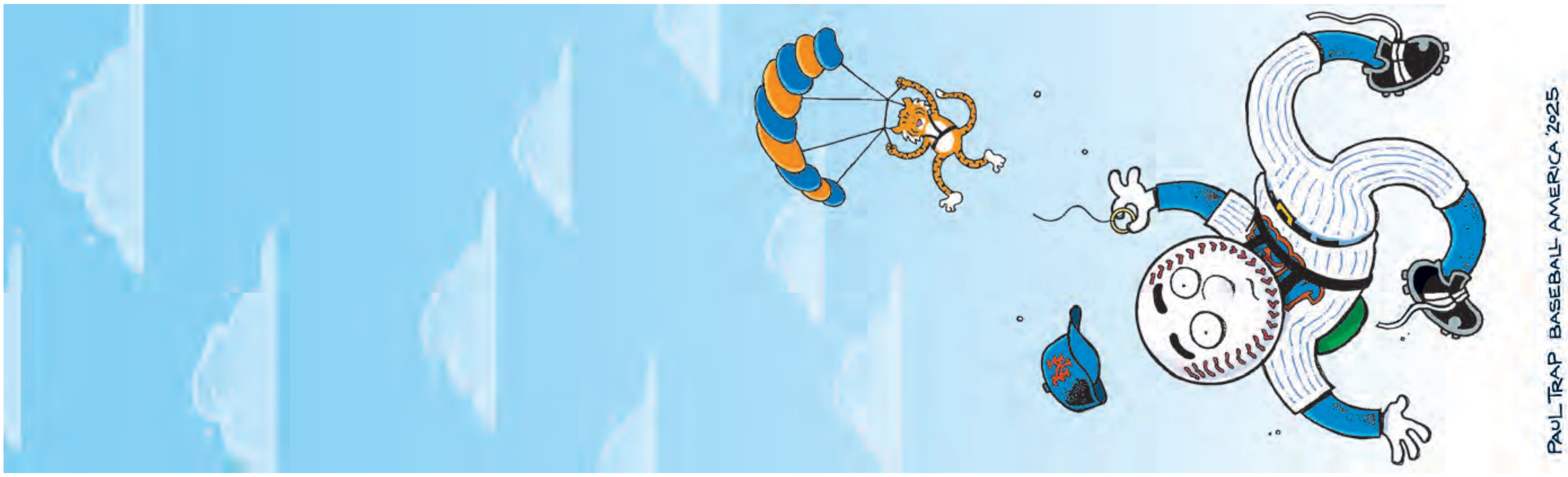


TRAITS TO TARGET

Batted-ball metrics help identify dynasty prospects on the rise

by GEOFF PONTES

Batted-ball data allows us to analyze minor league hitting performances that don't always show up with surface statistics. Taking a deeper look at key underlying metrics allows us to identify strengths, weaknesses and outliers. These high performers tend to produce at each new level.

Here, we identify five prospects who have trustworthy batted-ball traits, such as 90th percentile exit velocity, hard-hit percentage and air-pull percentage. Add these young hitters to your target lists in dynasty leagues.

Last year, this exercise highlighted young hitters ready to take a giant leap forward, including Tigers shortstop Kevin McGonigle, Dodgers outfielder Josue De Paula and Brewers shortstop Jesus Made.

EDWARD FLORENTINO, OF, PIRATES

Signed out of the Dominican Republic in 2024, Florentino was a revelation for the Pirates this season. He excelled in the Florida Complex League and for Low-A Bradenton, batting a combined .290/.400/.548 with 16 home runs and 35 stolen bases in 83 games. The 18-year-old Florentino's data across the board is phenomenal, and in some ways might be even better than his surface performance. He shows excellent bat-to-ball skills, a patient approach and legitimate plus power for his age and level. The most optimized part of Florentino's game is his bat path. The lefthanded hitter shows a knack for finding the barrel and elevating the ball to his pull side. While he can be somewhat passive in the zone, that will likely improve in the future.

CALEB BONEMER, SS, WHITE SOX

From 2024 second-round pick out of high school in Michigan to one of the best hitters in Low-A, Bonemer had a banner debut season for the White Sox. He batted .281/.400/.458 in 96 games for Low-A Kannapolis and led the Carolina League with an .859 OPS. He added 11 games for High-A Winston-Salem and tallied a combined 12 home runs and 27 stolen bases Bonemer showed plus bat-to-ball skills and strong on-base ability. One nit to pick is that the 19-year-old can get overly passive at times, taking too many pitches over the heart of the plate. Bonemer shows the potential for plus power, as evidenced by outstanding exit velocities an elite pull-air rate, an indicator that his best-struck balls have a great chance to leave the yard.

CARTER JENSEN, C, ROYALS

Drafted in the third round in 2021, Jensen made his MLB debut in September for his hometown Royals. He has shown strong analytical markers going back a few seasons. In 2025, everything was up slightly across the board. While there is swing-and-miss in Jensen's profile, he also faced the highest level of competition in the minors and produced. The 22-year-old lefthanded hitter batted .290/.377/.501 with 20 home runs in 111 games for Double-A Northwest Arkansas and Triple-A Omaha. Jensen shows average bat-to-ball skills, but they come with an above-average approach and plus power. He thrives by consistently producing hard contact. He's not fully optimized for pull-side power, but he has the type of power that allows him to hit the ball out to any part of the park.

THEO GILLEN, OF, RAYS

The Rays drafted Gillen 18th overall in 2024 out of high school in Austin, Texas. The 19-year-old lefthanded hitter has traditionally been known for his tools and projection, but in 2025 it was his elite on-base skills that made headlines. Only one teenage hitter had a higher walk rate than his 19.8%, and it was backed by an elite 14.8% chase rate. Gillen still shows a passive approach—his heart-swing rate and swing rate are both on the low side—but there's a fairly sizable difference between his swing and chase rates. That gap reflects some aggression in the zone. On contact, Gillen shows the potential for plus power as well as some ability to get to his pull-side power. His hard-hit rate is plus for his age group. Gillen batted .267/.433/.387 with five home runs and 36 stolen bases in 73 games for Low-A Charleston.

RAINIEL RODRIGUEZ, C, CARDINALS

One of the stars of the 2024 Dominican Summer League, Rodriguez made a splash in his first exposure to the U.S. minor leagues. The 18-year-old played at three levels and batted .273/.396/.543 with 19 home runs in 84 games as he climbed from the Florida Complex League to Low-A Palm Beach to High-A Peoria for a few games in September. Rodriguez has some swing-and-miss, but it's primarily in the zone. He shows the ability to hit a wide variety of pitch types and locations—often out of the zone—and he makes strong swing decisions while rarely missing pitches over the plate. Rodriguez's selling point is his elite quality of contact. He shows double-plus power for his age with a combination of both elite exit velocities and excellent launch angles. While he can hit it out to any part of the park, he especially shows pull-side power ability, suggesting higher future home run totals than other players his age. While Rodriguez's defense at catcher is a question, his bat looks to be elite. ■

STRAUSS
Kannapolis
18

White Sox shortstop prospect Caleb Bonemer showed a lot to like in his pro debut season, spent primarily at Low-A Kannapolis.

BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

Numbers Game

AN ANALYTICALLY INCLINED LOOK AT THE GAME

MINOR LEAGUE ALL-STARS BY LEVEL

Dylan Beavers

TRIPLE-A International ▪ Pacific Coast

■ Player of the Year: Dylan Beavers, OF, Norfolk (Orioles)
A quieter, more rhythmic swing helped Beavers dominate Triple-A and reach MLB.
■ Pitcher of the Year: Robby Snelling, LHP, Jacksonville (Marlins)
After reaching Triple-A on July 10, Snelling led the level in ERA and strikeouts.

Pos	Player, Team	Org	Age	PA	HR	AVG	OBP	SLG
C	Samuel Basallo, Norfolk	BAL	20	321	23	.270	.377	.589
1B	Jonathon Long, Iowa	CHC	23	607	20	.305	.404	.479
2B	Jordan Lawlar, Reno	ARI	22	300	11	.313	.403	.564
3B	Cody Freeman, Round Rock	TEX	24	426	19	.336	.382	.549
SS	JJ Wetherholt, Memphis	STL	22	221	10	.314	.416	.562
OF	Dylan Beavers, Norfolk	BAL	23	418	18	.304	.420	.515
OF	Owen Caissie, Iowa	CHC	22	433	22	.286	.386	.551
OF	Justin Crawford, Lehigh Valley	PHI	21	506	7	.334	.411	.452
DH	Luis Campusano, El Paso	SD	26	475	25	.336	.441	.595

Pos	Pitcher, Team	Org	Age	IP	BB	SO	WHIP	ERA
SP	Mick Abel, Lehigh Valley/St. Paul	MIN	23	98	40	114	1.11	2.20
SP	Joe Boyle, Durham	TB	25	86	41	114	1.01	1.88
SP	Nolan McLean, Syracuse	NYM	23	87	38	97	1.10	2.78
SP	Ian Seymour, Durham	TB	26	86	20	104	1.14	2.62
SP	Robby Snelling, Jacksonville	MIA	21	64	17	81	0.99	1.27
RP	Josh White, Jacksonville	MIA	24	39	11	57	0.97	2.29

DOUBLE-A Eastern ▪ Southern ▪ Texas

■ Player of the Year: JJ Wetherholt, SS, Springfield (Cardinals)
The 2024 seventh overall pick showed all five tools in big year in upper minors.
■ Pitcher of the Year: Jonah Tong, RHP, Binghamton (Mets)
Eastern League batters had their hands full with Tong's deadly fastball & changeup.

Pos	Player, Team	Org	Age	PA	HR	AVG	OBP	SLG
C	Cooper Ingle, Akron	CLE	23	403	9	.273	.391	.441
1B	Ryan Clifford, Binghamton	NYM	21	437	24	.243	.355	.493
2B	Jett Williams, Binghamton	NYM	21	421	10	.281	.390	.477
3B	Sal Stewart, Chattanooga	CIN	21	329	10	.306	.377	.473
SS	JJ Wetherholt, Springfield	STL	22	275	7	.300	.425	.466
OF	Kemp Alderman, Pensacola	MIA	22	454	15	.282	.337	.447
OF	Walker Jenkins, Wichita	MIN	20	235	7	.309	.426	.487
OF	Ryan Waldschmidt, Amarillo	ARI	22	300	9	.309	.423	.498
DH	Felix Reyes, Reading	PHI	24	395	15	.335	.365	.572

Pos	Pitcher, Team	Org	Age	IP	BB	SO	WHIP	ERA
SP	Henry Baez, San Antonio/Midland	ATH	22	109	35	100	1.05	2.39
SP	Ixan Henderson, Springfield	STL	23	132	51	134	1.14	2.59
SP	Ty Johnson, Montgomery	TB	23	110	38	149	0.94	2.61
SP	Shane Murphy, Birmingham	CWS	24	111	15	82	0.83	1.38
SP	Jonah Tong, Binghamton	NYM	22	102	44	162	0.92	1.59
RP	Alimber Santa, Corpus Christi	HOU	22	57	23	63	1.02	1.26

Jacob Bresnahan

HIGH-A Midwest ▪ Northwest ▪ South Atlantic

■ Player of the Year: Konnor Griffin, SS, Greensboro (Pirates)
The POY hit seven of his 21 homers and stole 33 of his 65 bases while at High-A.
■ Pitcher of the Year: Daniel Eagen, RHP, Hillsboro (Diamondbacks)
Eagen looks like another mid-major find for the D-backs, a la Brandon Pfaadt.

Pos	Player, Team	Org	Age	PA	HR	AVG	OBP	SLG
C	Josue Briceño, West Michigan	DET	20	244	15	.296	.422	.602
1B	Esmerlyn Valdez, Greensboro	PIT	21	314	20	.303	.385	.592
2B	Michael Arroyo, Everett	SEA	20	306	15	.269	.422	.512
3B	Jacob Reimer, Brooklyn	NYM	21	268	8	.284	.384	.502
SS	Konnor Griffin, Greensboro	PIT	19	234	7	.325	.432	.510
OF	Carson Benge, Brooklyn	NYM	22	271	4	.302	.417	.480
OF	Max Clark, West Michigan	DET	20	330	7	.285	.430	.427
OF	Bo Davidson, Eugene	SF	22	335	10	.309	.412	.507
DH	Kevin McGonigle, West Michigan	DET	20	171	7	.372	.462	.648

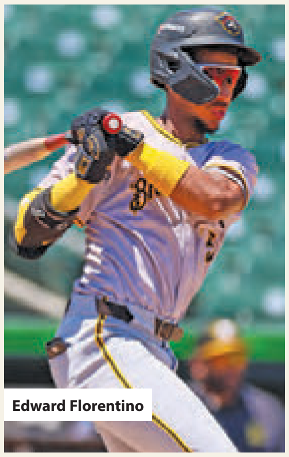
Pos	Pitcher, Team	Org	Age	IP	BB	SO	WHIP	ERA
SP	Kyle Carr, Hudson Valley	NYY	23	119	47	104	1.07	1.96
SP	David Davalillo, Hub City	TEX	22	51	11	68	0.82	2.12
SP	Daniel Eagen, Hillsboro	ARI	22	98	41	132	1.06	2.49
SP	Josh Hartle, Lake County	CLE	22	103	37	100	1.05	2.35
SP	Elmer Rodriguez-Cruz, H.V.	NYY	21	84	37	99	1.06	2.26
RP	Garrett Hawkins, Fort Wayne	SD	25	44	13	60	0.68	1.43

LOW-A California ▪ Carolina ▪ Florida State

■ Player of the Year: Eduardo Quintero, OF, Rancho Cucamonga (Dodgers)
Quintero hit 14 homers, stole 35 bases and led the Cal League with a .960 OPS.
■ Pitcher of the Year: Jacob Bresnahan, LHP, San Jose (Giants)
Added in the 2024 Alex Cobb trade, Bresnahan led all Low-A lefties with 124 Ks.

Pos	Player, Team	Org	Age	PA	HR	AVG	OBP	SLG
C	Alfredo Duno, Daytona	CIN	19	495	18	.287	.430	.518
1B	Victor Figueroa, Lake Elsinore	SD	21	232	7	.262	.375	.456
2B	Luis Peña, Carolina	MIL	18	309	6	.308	.375	.469
3B	Caleb Bonemer, Kannapolis	CWS	19	432	10	.281	.400	.458
SS	Konnor Griffin, Bradenton	PIT	19	231	9	.338	.396	.536
OF	Slade Caldwell, Visalia	ARI	19	216	3	.294	.460	.454
OF	Theo Gillen, Charleston	TB	19	324	5	.267	.433	.387
OF	Eduardo Quintero, R. Cucamonga	LAD	19	395	14	.306	.426	.533
DH	Raudi Rodriguez, Inland Empire	LAA	21	560	14	.281	.372	.470

Pos	Pitcher, Team	Org	Age	IP	BB	SO	WHIP	ERA
SP	Jacob Bresnahan, San Jose	SF	20	93	43	124	1.18	2.61
SP	Caden Scarborough, Hickory	TEX	20	75	19	95	0.92	2.88
SP	Lucas Elissalt, Lakeland	DET	20	65	20	77	0.98	2.48
SP	David Shields, Columbia	KC	18	72	15	81	1.02	2.01
SP	Ryan Sloan, Modesto	SEA	19	71	15	77	1.15	3.44
RP	Benny Thompson, Inland Empire	LAA	23	61	43	100	1.21	1.91


Edward Florentino

ROOKIE COMPLEX LEAGUES
Arizona ▪ Florida ▪ Dominican Summer

■ Pitcher of the Year: Keyner Martinez, RHP, ACL Giants
Martinez led all Rookie-level pitchers with 67 strikeouts before heading to Low-A.

Pos	Pitcher, League	Org	Age	IP	BB	SO	WHIP	ERA
SP	Argenis Cayama, ACL Giants	SF	18	48	18	55	1.06	2.25
SP	Keyner Martinez, ACL Giants	SF	20	47	10	67	1.10	1.90
SP	Esteban Mejia, FCL Orioles	BAL	18	40	25	53	1.31	2.45
SP	Javier Perez, FCL Astros	HOU	21	43	8	48	0.98	1.69
SP	Franco Zabaleta, DSL Athletics	ATH	18	54	14	44	0.85	0.51
RP	Roberto Perez, ACL Mariners	SEA	21	25	8	33	0.75	1.42

■ Player of the Year: Edward Florentino, OF, FCL Pirates
The 6-foot-4 lefthanded hitter showed profile power in a breakthrough season.

Pos	Player, League	Org	Age	PA	HR	AVG	OBP	SLG
C	Rainiel Rodriguez, FCL Cardinals	STL	18	80	7	.373	.513	.831
1B	David Beckles, FCL Blue Jays	TOR	21	237	8	.304	.388	.483
2B	Dauri Fernandez, ACL Guardians	CLE	18	176	6	.333	.398	.558
3B	Juan Sanchez, DSL Blue Jays	TOR	17	253	8	.341	.439	.565
SS	Yandel Ricardo, ACL Royals	KC	18	145	2	.342	.438	.533
OF	Roldy Brito, ACL Rockies	COL	18	209	3	.368	.445	.555
OF	Edward Florentino, FCL Pirates	PIT	18	113	6	.347	.442	.642
OF	Ching-Hsien Ko, ACL Dodgers	LAD	18	226	4	.367	.487	.539
DH	Edgar Montero, DSL Athletics	ATH	18	244	9	.313	.484	.580

BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (BEAVERS, BILL MITCHELL (BRESNAHAN), TOM DIPACE (FLORENTINO)

TO
STORY

OF THE 2025 MAJOR AND

by MATT E

1

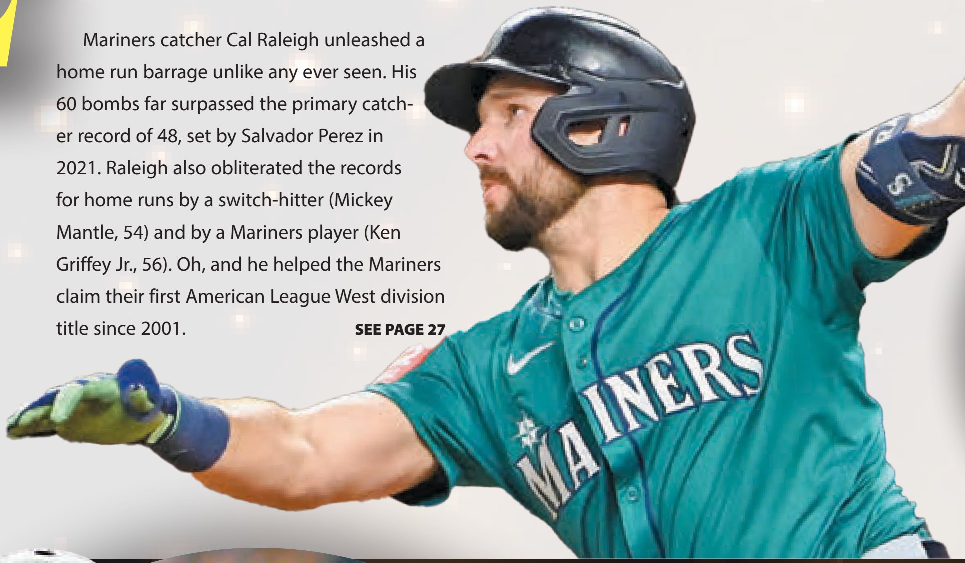
KONNOR GRIFFIN STANDS POISED AS THE NEXT FIVE-TOOL SUPERSTAR

The Pirates drafted High School Player of the Year Konnor Griffin with the ninth pick in the 2024 draft. About a year later he was thriving at Double-A on his way to a Minor League Player of the Year award. Griffin hit .333 with 21 home runs and 65 stolen bases while playing a lockdown shortstop. His five-tool talent brings to mind past POYs-turned-MLB superstars Ronald Acuña Jr. and Bobby Witt Jr.

SEE PAGE 12

2

CAL RALEIGH BREAKS UNBREAKABLE RECORDS



Mariners catcher Cal Raleigh unleashed a home run barrage unlike any ever seen. His 60 bombs far surpassed the primary catcher record of 48, set by Salvador Perez in 2021. Raleigh also obliterated the records for home runs by a switch-hitter (Mickey Mantle, 54) and by a Mariners player (Ken Griffey Jr., 56). Oh, and he helped the Mariners claim their first American League West division title since 2001.

SEE PAGE 27

3

THE AMAZING AARON JUDGE

Aaron Judge is not only the best hitter on the planet—the Yankees superstar is one of the best hitters in history. This year he topped 50 home runs for the fourth time, tying him with Mark McGwire, Babe Ruth and Sammy Sosa for the most 50-homer seasons ever. Judge also led all MLB hitters in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging, something that has been done just six times since World War II.

SEE PAGE 24

4

NICK KURTZ'S POWERFUL INTRODUCTION

Nick Kurtz hit 36 home runs to situate himself between Mark McGwire and Jose Canseco on the Athletics' all-time leaderboard for rookie hitters. That seems fitting as the powerful young first baseman looks to lead the A's young lineup core to contention. Kurtz's rapid rise also continues a recent trend of quick ascension from the draft to MLB debut. Seven 2024 draft picks reached MLB in 2025: Chase Burns, Jac Caglianone, Kurtz, Christian Moore, Cam Smith, Payton Tolle and Trey Yesavage.

SEE PAGE 20

5

JONAH TONG TOYS WITH MINOR LEAGUE HITTERS

Few minor league pitchers have reached the level of dominance achieved by Mets 22-year-old righthander Jonah Tong this year. In a season he spent mostly at Double-A, Tong led all minor league pitchers with a 1.43 ERA, 179 strikeouts and a .148 opponent average. Nobody had ever done that since Baseball America began tracking overall minor league category leaders in 1993.

SEE PAGE 18

P 10
LINES
MINOR LEAGUE SEASONS

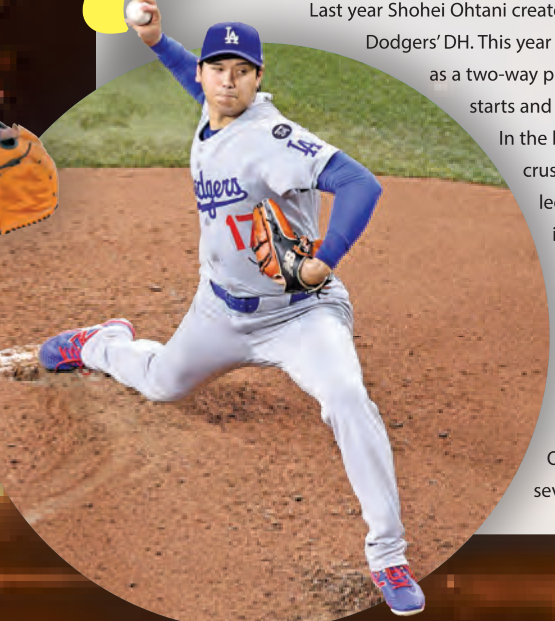
DDY

6
SUPER SKENES

Pirates ace Paul Skenes struck out 216 batters and recorded a 1.97 ERA in 32 starts, making him the rare pitcher to strike out 200 with a sub-2.00 ERA. The other pitchers to do the same in the past 25 years are Jacob deGrom, Blake Snell, Jake Arrieta, Zack Greinke, Clayton Kershaw and Pedro Martinez. The 23-year-old Skenes is likely to add another distinction: Cy Young Award winner. The only other pitcher to go from Rookie of the Year one season to CYA the next was Dwight Gooden in 1984 and '85.

7
SHOHEI OHTANI RESUMES TWO-WAY CAREER

Last year Shohei Ohtani created the 50-50 club as the Dodgers' DH. This year he resumed his career as a two-way player by making 14 starts and recording a 2.87 ERA. In the batter's box, Ohtani crushed 55 home runs and led the National League in OPS, putting him on track to win another MVP award. Doing so would give him four career MVPs, which would rank as the second most all-time. Only Barry Bonds, with seven MVPs, has more.



8
TIGERS' TAIL OF TWO SEASONS

Tigers minor league affiliates compiled a .589 winning percentage, the highest among all 30 organizations. High-A West Michigan went 92-70 and its .702 winning percentage is the highest for a full-season club in the 21st century. The Whitecaps won the Midwest League championship, as did Low-A Lakeland in the Florida State League. That performance was in sharp contrast with Detroit's performance down the stretch. The Tigers led the American League Central by as many as 15.5 games on July 8 but were caught atop the division by the Guardians on Sept. 23 and had to settle for a wild card.

Tigers prospect trio of Kevin McGonigle, Josue Briceño and Max Clark

9
NEVER COUNT OUT THE BREWERS

The Brewers lost head of baseball operations David Stearns and manager Craig Counsell after the 2023 season and just kept rolling. Star shortstop Willy Adames departed as a free agent after 2024. Milwaukee kept rolling. This year, the Brewers posted the best record in baseball, won their third straight National League Central division title and made the playoffs for the seventh time in the last eight seasons—all with a payroll that ranks in the lower third of teams. Expect the good times to keep rolling because Milwaukee has one of the game's top farm systems.

Jackson Chourio

10
METS FADE INTO OBLIVION

The Mets entered play on Sept. 1 with a 93.2% chance to make the playoffs, according to FanGraphs. But 93% is not 100%, and the Mets went 10-15 in September—after going 11-17 in August—to lose a National League wild card by one game to the 83-win Reds. At one point in June, the Mets had an MLB-best record of 45-24. In the American League, the Astros had an 88.4% chance to reach October and lost their grip on a wild card. The Tigers had 100% playoff odds on Sept. 1 and nearly blew it with a 7-17 finish. They had to settle for a wild card.

Pete Alonso

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (GRIFFIN, ERIE SEAWOLVES), MONICA BRADBURN/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (RALEIGH), JAY BIGGERSTAFF/GETTY IMAGES (JUDGE), STEPH CHAMBERS/GETTY IMAGES (KURTZ), JARED BLAIS/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (TONG), DUSTIN SATLOFF/GETTY IMAGES (SKENES), CHRIS CODUTO/GETTY IMAGES (OHTANI), PATRICK MCDERMOTT/GETTY IMAGES (CHOURIO), MEGAN BRIGGS/GETTY IMAGES (ALONSO)

Baseball America
MINOR LEAGUE PLAYER OF THE YEAR
KONNOR GRIFFIN

BUC OF ALL TRADES

Pirates five-tool prospect **Konnor Griffin** made key adjustments to advance all the way to Double-A as a teenager

by GEOFF PONTES

When Konnor Griffin made his pro debut with Low-A Bradenton in April, it didn't start on a high note.

The 19-year-old shortstop struck out in six of his first eight at-bats. The Pirates 2024 first-round pick made sure that didn't happen again and didn't record another two-game stretch with six strikeouts all season.

"There were some swing adjustments that I had to make," Griffin said.

Adjust he did.

After recovering from a rough start, Griffin hit .333/.415/.527 with 21 home runs, 65 stolen bases and 117 runs scored en route to a historically successful debut season in which he climbed three levels to Double-A Altoona and finished the season ranked as the No. 1 overall prospect.

Now, Griffin is also the Minor League Player of the Year.

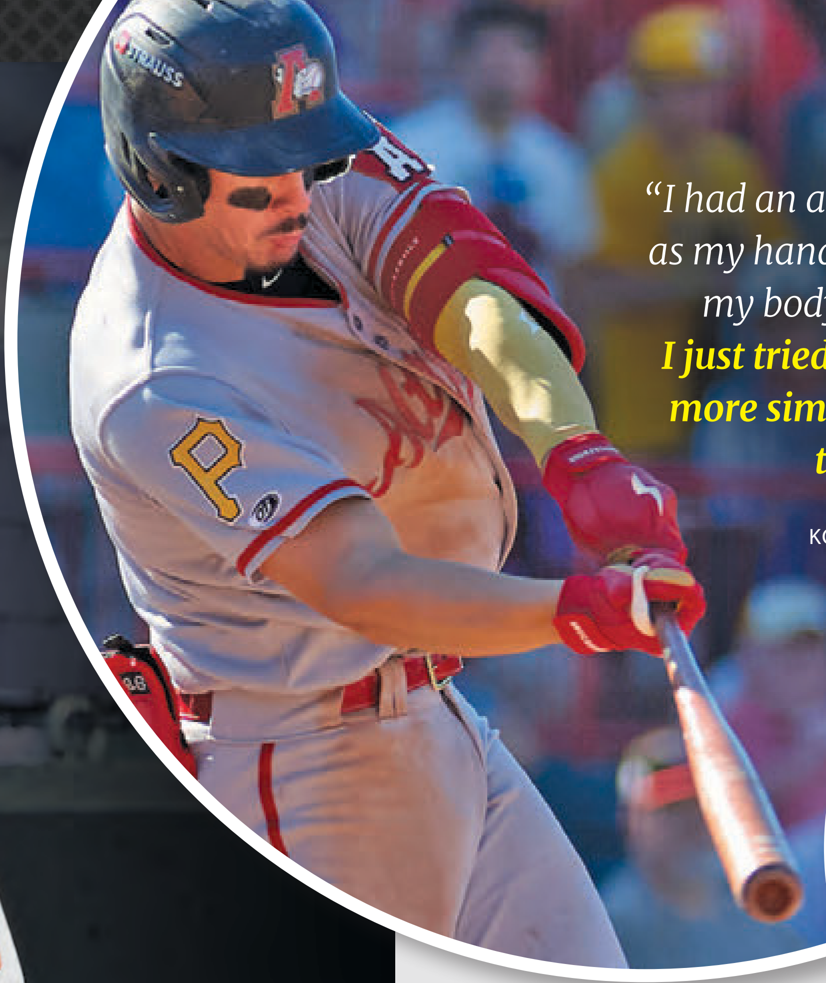
Griffin achieved the honor thanks in part to offensive dominance not seen in years. Over the last 20 minor league seasons, he is the only player to produce a season with a .300 average, 20 or more home runs, 60 or more stolen bases and 100 or more runs.

And while the offensive numbers speak for themselves, the versatility he showed in the field was what set Griffin apart from his top prospect peers in 2025.

Drafted ninth overall out of high school as a shortstop with plus defense, Griffin also stood out defensively in center field, giving him a chance to provide rare value at two premium defensive positions.

Such was the season for Griffin, who spent 2025 as one of the youngest players on every field he stepped foot on while also always being the most talented.

"It's been a crazy year and a long journey," Griffin said.



> *"I had an arm bar in high school, as my hands would be back with my body moving forward.* ***I just tried to make everything more simple, shorter, quicker to the ball."***
>
> KONNOR GRIFFIN

Griffin in high school

"I really didn't know what to expect. I've learned a lot about myself and I just try and get better every day."

As Griffin climbed the minor league ladder, his ability to improve and adjust to each new challenge made his season even more impressive.

After hitting .338/.396/.536 over 50 games with Bradenton—a batting line 56% better than his Florida State League peers—Griffin's numbers got better in High-A.

Over 51 games with Greensboro, he hit .325/.432/.510 for a line 70% better than South Atlantic League competition. This trend continued over the final month of the season upon promotion to Altoona, where Griffin slashed .337/.418/.542 over 21 games to finish with a line that was 75% better than the average Eastern League hitter.

Griffin helped lead Altoona into the playoffs, pushing a talented Erie team to a deciding Game 3 by going 6-for-10 with three walks in the series.

Though Griffin, the High School Player of the Year in 2024, was highly touted coming out of Jackson Preparatory School in Mississippi, there were lingering questions about his hit tool as he turned pro.

A swing change last offseason that saw Griffin strive to become more fluid and streamlined at the plate helped answer those questions emphatically.

"I had an arm bar in high school, as my hands would be back with my body moving forward," Griffin said. "I just tried to make everything more simple, shorter, quicker to the ball."

The results had people taking notice even before the season began. Still only 18 at the time and without an official professional game on his ledger, Griffin was the talk of minor league spring training in Florida, and his performances on the backfields left scouts plenty impressed.

While evaluators had a hunch Griffin would succeed as a professional due to athleticism and tools that checked every box as a potential breakout, few predicted the dominance that would follow

Baseball America
DOUBLE ISSUE! BEST TOOLS AND SUMMER TOP 100 PROSPECTS!
KONNOR GRIFFIN'S FIVE-TOOL POTENTIAL MAKES THE PIRATES SHORTSTOP THE TOP OVERALL PROSPECT
BANG FOR THE BUCS

Baseball America 2026
PROSPECT HANDBOOK
COMPREHENSIVE SCOUTING REPORTS FOR THE TOP 30 PROSPECTS IN EVERY ORGANIZATION

Griffin's power-speed combo recalls past POY winners such as Ronald Acuña Jr., Andruw Jones and Bobby Witt Jr.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (MAIN, SWINGING NOW), BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (SWINGING IN HIGH SCHOOL)

over the next five and a half months.

But the seeds of success were there from the start. Listed at 6-foot-4 and 215 pounds, Griffin is an outlier athlete who was an elite performer in pre-draft athletic testing. Those skills were showcased in 2025 by way of his plus-plus speed, plus game power, plus defense at two up-the-middle positions and a hit tool that, despite pre-draft questions, now grades as easily plus.

Griffin's hit tool quality is backed not only by his .333 batting average and 21.7% strikeout rate but by advanced metrics, as well. His 16.5% in-zone whiff rate this season is quite a bit lower than the minor league average, and he displays a good balance of patience and aggression within his plate approach.

While Griffin's power was never in question, it has manifested in a more substantial way than anticipated. Griffin's 107.6 mph 90th percentile exit velocity and 115.7 mph max EV are both 80-grade metrics among teenage peers.

What might be even more frightening for opposing pitchers is that Griffin is still learning to optimize his batted-ball angles. That's perhaps the most exciting aspect of Griffin's season.

Despite immense success at every level and five plus-or-better tools, Griffin could still improve.

At just 19 years old, Griffin heads into the offseason as the No. 1 prospect in baseball and Minor League Player of the Year. And after his breakout 2025 campaign, he joins Paul Skenes in carrying the fortunes of a Pirates franchise whose fans are desperate for reasons to be hopeful after Pittsburgh has failed to make the playoffs for 10 seasons and hasn't played in a National League Championship Series since 1992.

Whether it's at the start of 2026 or some time later next summer, Griffin figures to grace the infield at PNC Park sooner rather than later as baseball's next superstar in the making. ■

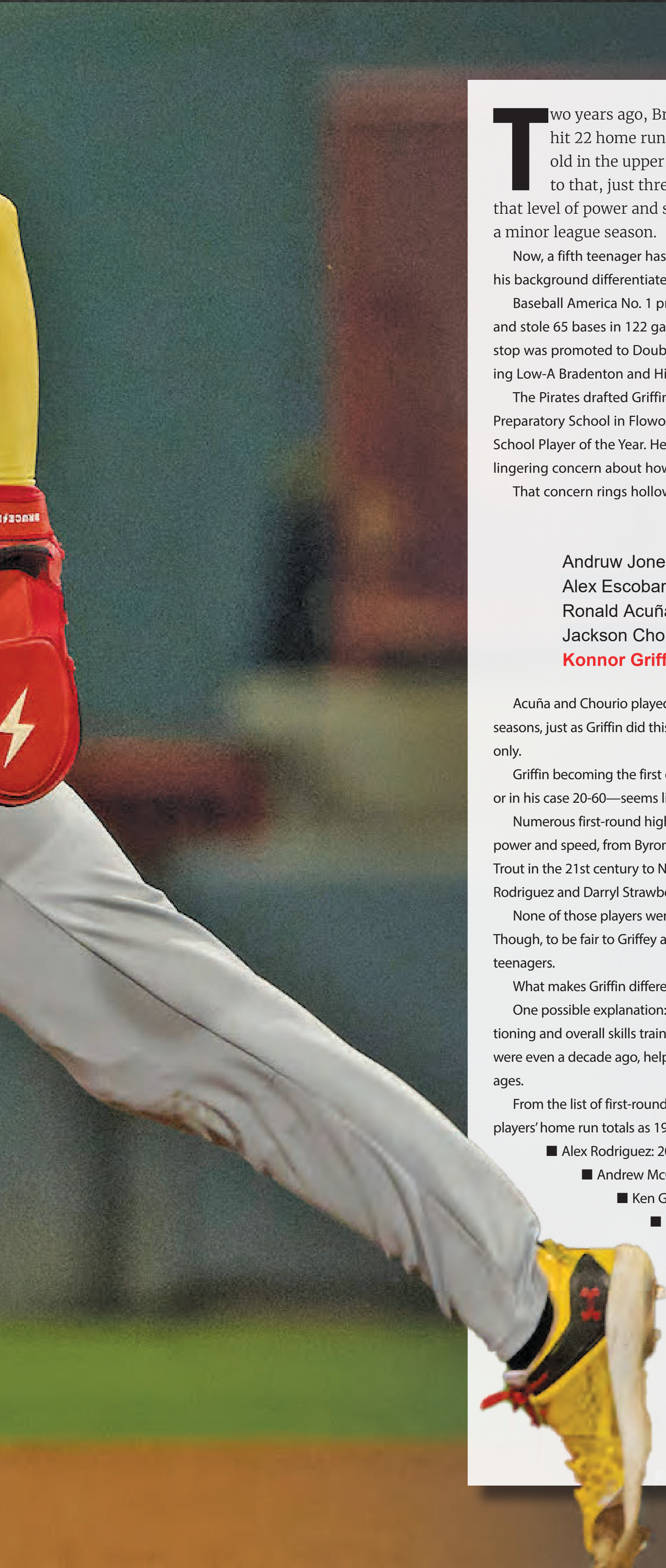
LISTEN NOW!

Just how good can Konnor Griffin be? Scan the QR code to listen to the discussion on BA's Prospect Podcast

GRIFFIN JOINS RARE POWER-SPEED CLUB WITH 20-40 SEASON

by MATT EDDY

Konnor Griffin is the first drafted player to go at least 20-40 as a teenager. He hit 21 homers and stole 65 bases.



MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

Two years ago, Brewers prospect Jackson Chourio hit 22 home runs and stole 44 bases as a 19-year-old in the upper levels of the minor leagues. Prior to that, just three teenagers since 1963 had shown that level of power and speed proficiency by going 20-40 in a minor league season.

Now, a fifth teenager has joined the 20-40 club, and one aspect of his background differentiates him from the others.

Baseball America No. 1 prospect Konnor Griffin hit 21 home runs and stole 65 bases in 122 games this season. The 19-year-old shortstop was promoted to Double-A Altoona in mid August after mastering Low-A Bradenton and High-A Greensboro.

The Pirates drafted Griffin ninth overall in 2024 out of Jackson Preparatory School in Flowood, Miss., where he had been named High School Player of the Year. He slipped down the draft board based on lingering concern about how his hit tool would play in a pro setting.

That concern rings hollow today. Griffin has batted .333/.415/.527 in his first 563 pro plate appearances. At the conclusion of the Double-A season, he ranked fifth in the minor league batting race, eighth in steals and ninth with a .944 OPS.

While Griffin isn't the first teen prospect to reach 20 homers and 40 steals in a season, he is the first drafted player to reach those marks. The other four signed internationally, three of them from Venezuela.

STANDOUT POWER-SPEED TEENAGERS

Braves prospect Andruw Jones hit 25 homers and stole 56 bases for Low-A Macon in 1995. He was an 18-year-old center fielder who had signed out of Curacao in 1993. Jones was also the founding member of the 20-40 club for teenagers.

The next three teenagers to reach 20-40 were all Venezuelan outfielders: the Mets' Alex Escobar in 1998, the Braves' Ronald Acuña Jr. in 2017 and the Brewers' Jackson Chourio in 2023.

Griffin joined them this season. Here are all five power-speed teens, where **PSN** is power-speed number:

	Year	Age	Lvl	HR	SB	AVG	OBP	SLG	PSN
Andruw Jones	1995	18	A	25	56	.278	.372	.512	34.6
Alex Escobar	1998	19	A	27	49	.310	.393	.584	34.8
Ronald Acuña Jr.	2017	19	3 LVL	21	44	.325	.374	.522	28.4
Jackson Chourio	2023	19	2 LVL	22	44	.283	.338	.467	29.3
Konnor Griffin	**2025**	**19**	**3 LVL**	**21**	**65**	**.333**	**.415**	**.527**	**31.7**

Acuña and Chourio played at multiple levels during their 20-40 seasons, just as Griffin did this year. Jones and Escobar played at Low-A only.

Griffin becoming the first drafted player to go 20-40 as a teenager—or in his case 20-60—seems like an oddity.

Numerous first-round high school players before Griffin had ample power and speed, from Byron Buxton, Andrew McCutchen and Mike Trout in the 21st century to No. 1 overall picks Ken Griffey Jr., Alex Rodriguez and Darryl Strawberry in the late 20th century.

None of those players went 20-40 in the minors before turning 20. Though, to be fair to Griffey and A-Rod, they reached the big leagues as teenagers.

What makes Griffin different?

One possible explanation: Player development, strength-and-conditioning and overall skills training are more streamlined today than they were even a decade ago, helping prospects realize their power at earlier ages.

From the list of first-round, power-speed preps above, here are those players' home run totals as 19-year-olds:

- Alex Rodriguez: 20 (15 at Triple-A and five in MLB)
- Andrew McCutchen: 17
- Ken Griffey Jr.: 16 (as a Mariners rookie in 1989)
- Darryl Strawberry: 13
- Byron Buxton: 12
- Mike Trout: 11

SPEEDY ACCLIMATION TO PRO BALL

Griffin finished with 21 homers this season. That in and of itself is not a rare feat for a teenager. There are more than 150 teenagers since 1963 who have hit 20 or more in a minor league season.

Griffin's ability to blend speed with that power sets him apart. Even if we lower the thresholds to 20 homers and 30 steals, just three other drafted players have reached those marks as teen minor leaguers since 1963.

Dan Hirsch of Baseball-Reference confirms that list to be: Chili Davis in 1979, Corey Patterson in 1999 and Delmon Young in 2005. All three were drafted players who went 20-30 as teenagers in the minors.

Griffin finished with 65 steals. While it's true that recent rules changes have boosted stolen base attempts and successes dramatically, even if we were to scale back Griffin's stolen-base takeoff rate when he reaches first base by 20%, he would still top 40 stolen bases with ease this season.

In other words, it would be unfair to view Griffin's incredible season as a creation of "stolen baseflation."

So, what makes Griffin's power-speed exploits so rare for a drafted player? It may come down to prior pro experience. High school players are typically drafted at age 18 and then make their full-season debuts as 19-year-olds.

A player who signs internationally can begin playing in pro games at age 17. For example, Escobar, Acuña and Chourio had already logged two pro seasons—and received all the extra instruction that entails—before their age-19 seasons. Jones differs in that he had only one pro season in Rookie ball prior to his epic 1995 season as an 18-year-old.

Griffin had zero pro experience before Opening Day this year, which is typical for high school draftees. Even those who sign quickly out of the draft and report to an affiliate can log about a month of pro experience. Back before the pandemic, in the days of the earlier June draft and six total short-season leagues, a high school draftee could really only play for about two months.

That helped prepare draftees for a full minor league season, but it wasn't the same as international signees having as many as two pro seasons before their age-19 campaigns.

Now that Griffin has set a new bar for draftees, it will be fascinating to see if others join him in the years ahead. ■

Snelling

Kevin McGonigle

MINOR LEAGUE ALL-STAR TEAM

capsules by **MATT EDDY**

Baseball America celebrates the top performances by prospects at every position by selecting Minor League All-Star teams at the conclusion of each season.

We weight our selections toward players who performed at the upper levels of the minor leagues, which is why every first-team selection reached Double-A or Triple-A. Seven first-teamers reached the major leagues in 2025.

Players are listed at the highest minor league level they reached this season.

C SAMUEL BASALLO, ORIOLES

TRIPLE-A NORFOLK

Basallo dealt with an elbow injury in spring training and was later hobbled with a hamstring issue. The Orioles called him up on Aug. 15. In between, Basallo might have been the most impressive young power hitter in the minor leagues. As the youngest everyday player at Triple-A, he belted 23 home runs in 76 games while batting .270/.377/.589. Basallo's .319 isolated slugging percentage was the best for a full-season hitter in his age-20 season or younger, while his 12.9% barrel rate per plate appearance was the highest at Triple-A among batters of any age.

1B JOSUE BRICEÑO, TIGERS

DOUBLE-A ERIE

The Tigers promoted Briceño, Max Clark and Kevin McGonigle in tandem from High-A West Michigan to Double-A Erie at midseason. The trio helped the Whitecaps post a .702 winning percentage in the first half, then helped power the SeaWolves to the Eastern League finals. Briceño bashed 20 home runs in 100 games—46 of them at catcher, 32 at first base and 22 more at DH—while batting .266/.383/.500 as a 20-year-old. While he faces questions about his viability behind the plate, Briceño's power is real.

2B JJ WETHERHOLT, CARDINALS

TRIPLE-A MEMPHIS

The seventh overall pick in the 2024 draft, Wetherholt played primarily shortstop this season but mixed in 20 games at second base and 12 more at third base. While his future position is not yet determined, the quality of his bat is a settled matter. The 23-year-old Wetherholt spent his season at Double-A Springfield and Triple-A Memphis and batted .306/.421/.510 with 17 home runs in 109 games. His OBP ranked fifth in the minors, while his 23 stolen bases were a welcome sight after a hamstring injury compromised his junior year at West Virginia.

3B SAL STEWART, REDS

TRIPLE-A LOUISVILLE

Stewart hit 17 of his 20 minor league home runs in his final 62 games prior to his Sept. 1 callup to Cincinnati. Before the barrage, the 21-year-old was hitting for average and getting on base for Double-A Chattanooga, but he was putting too many pitcher's pitches in play. Once Stewart narrowed his zone to seek damage, his production took off. He finished with a .309/.383/.524 batting line in the minors with career highs of 34 doubles and 20 homers.

SS KONNOR GRIFFIN, PIRATES

DOUBLE-A ALTOONA

One would be hard pressed to find a more complete minor league season than the one Griffin produced in his pro debut. His combination of performance, potential and carrying tools were the pillars of his Minor League Player of the Year case. The 19-year-

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (MCGONIGLE), DANNY PARKER/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (SNELLING)

old Griffin mastered two levels of Class A and climbed to Double-A on Aug. 19 to participate in Altoona's run to the Eastern League playoffs. Along the way, he hit .333/.415/.527 with 21 home runs and 65 stolen bases to finish fourth in the minor league batting race and eighth in steals. Only one player scored more runs than Griffin's 117, and he ranked top 10 in the minors with 161 hits, 94 RBIs and a .942 OPS.

OF DYLAN BEAVERS, ORIOLES

TRIPLE-A NORFOLK

The Orioles chose Jackson Holliday with the first pick of the 2022 draft and then chose Beavers with the first pick of the competitive balance round that year. Both played for Baltimore this season, Beavers after a dominating run through the International League in which he finished fourth with a .935 OPS. The 24-year-old batted .304/.420/.515 with 18 home runs and 23 stolen bases in 94 games for Norfolk, standing out for his ability to swing at—and make contact with—strikes and seldom chase pitches. Beavers' swing decisions stood up to big league scrutiny in his initial run through MLB.

OF MAX CLARK, TIGERS

DOUBLE-A ERIE

Clark did a little bit of everything well this season as he climbed to Double-A as a 20-year-old and put himself in play for the Tigers' big league roster next season. At High-A West Michigan and Double-A Erie, Clark batted .271/.403/.432 with 14 home runs and 19 stolen bases. He played center field every day. He drew 94 walks—the fifth-highest total in the minors—against 90 strikeouts. Clark's all-around ability could make him baseball's next five-tool center field star.

OF EDUARDO QUINTERO, DODGERS

HIGH-A GREAT LAKES

The 19-year-old Quintero turned in one of the finest seasons by a teenager in full-season ball. Spending most of the year with Low-A Rancho Cucamonga, he combined power and speed like no teen this side of Konnor Griffin. Counting his 32 games at High-A, Quintero batted .293/.415/.508 with 19 home runs and 47 stolen bases. He ranked 10th in the minor leagues in on-base percentage and ninth with 101 runs scored. The Dodgers promoted Quintero out of the California League on July 23, but he held on to lead the circuit with a .959 OPS.

DH KEVIN MCGONIGLE, TIGERS

DOUBLE-A ERIE

McGonigle teased at his potential in 2024, when he put up an .853 OPS in 74 games but hit just five home runs in a season spent primarily at Low-A. The 20-year-old shortstop left no doubt about his overall hitting potential this season. McGonigle plowed through High-A on his way to Double-A while hitting .305/.408/.583 with 19 homers in 88 games. His slugging percentage was third-highest in the minor leagues. He drew 59 walks against 46 strikeouts. McGonigle and his picturesque lefthanded swing appear ready to assume a spot on the Detroit infield at some point next season.

SP ELMER RODRIGUEZ-CRUZ, YANKEES

TRIPLE-A SCRANTON/WILKES-BARRE

The Yankees helped Rodriguez-Cruz amplify his sweeper and added a sinker to create a six-pitch mix. The 22-year-old righthander did the rest by staying healthy, completing 150 innings and turning in one of the best pitching seasons in the minor leagues. Rodriguez-Cruz marched from High-A through Double-A and on to Triple-A for one start, compiling 176 strikeouts to rank second in the minors. His 2.58 ERA ranked eighth. Rodriguez-Cruz succeeds by locating his low-spin pitches down in the zone to generate whiffs and a high rate of groundball contact.

SP PAYTON TOLLE, RED SOX

TRIPLE-A WORCESTER

Tolle represents a giant win for Red Sox scouting and player development—literally. The 6-foot-6, 250-pound lefthander played both ways in college before focusing on pitching as a Texas Christian junior in 2024. Boston liked what it saw and drafted Tolle in the second round; little more than a year later he reached the big leagues. He fires mid-90s fastballs from a low release height and with elite extension, reducing opposing batters' reaction time. Tolle's elite minor league strikeout rate (36.5%) and swinging-strike rate (17.9%) suggest the strategy worked to perfection.

SP JONAH TONG, METS

TRIPLE-A SYRACUSE

Baseball America has tracked overall minor league category leaders since 1993. Not until this season had one pitcher led the entire minors in ERA, strikeouts and opponent average. Tong is the first to pull off the triple play with his 1.43 ERA, 179 strikeouts and .148 opponent average that he compiled in 20 starts for Double-A Binghamton plus two more at Triple-A before the Mets called him up on Aug. 29. Tong owes his breakthrough to enhanced fastball velocity and a new Vulcan-grip changeup that completes his north-south pitching profile. The 22-year-old righthander now pitches in the mid 90s with elite extension and ride from a unique over-the-top arm slot.

SP ROBBY SNELLING, MARLINS

TRIPLE-A JACKSONVILLE

Snelling carried a 6.01 ERA through 16 starts in the Padres' system in 2024 before a deadline trade to the Marlins helped him get back on track. Adding power to his fastball and curveball, while incorporating a slider and improving the separation on his changeup, brought out the best in the 21-year-old Snelling. He turned in one of the finest efforts by a minor league lefthander this season. Snelling's 166 strikeouts ranked fourth in the minors, while his 2.51 ERA placed fifth and his groundball rate of 50.8% was well above-average.

SP TREY YESAVAGE, BLUE JAYS

TRIPLE-A BUFFALO

The Blue Jays might have gotten the steal of the 2024 first round when East Carolina ace Yesavage fell to them at pick No. 20. To underscore that point, the 22-year-old righthander mastered four levels of the minor leagues this season and made his MLB debut on Sept. 15. Yesavage's high overhand slot helps his fastball, slider and deadly splitter all play up, as testified to by his 160 strikeouts that ranked seventh in the minors. He pitched to a 3.12 ERA over 98 innings, while his 41.1% strikeout rate and 19.7% swinging-strike rate were both No. 1 among pitchers with at least 90 innings.

RP HAYDEN HARRIS, BRAVES

TRIPLE-A GWINNETT

The Braves signed Harris as a fifth-year undrafted free agent out of Georgia Southern in 2022. While he hasn't started a game in pro ball, the 26-year-old lefthander has been plenty effective in a relief role. Harris peaked this season, when he allowed three earned runs in 52 innings at Double-A and Triple-A to earn a spot in the Futures Game and a September callup. Among minor league relievers with at least 50 innings and 30 appearances this season, Harris had the lowest ERA (0.52) and WHIP (0.75), while only one had a higher strikeout rate than his 40.3%. ■

FIRST TEAM

Pos	Player, Org (Peak Level)	Age	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	wRC+
C	Samuel Basallo, Orioles (AAA)	20	.270	.377	.589	270	23	67	44	76	0	151
1B	Josue Briceño, Tigers (AA)	20	.266	.383	.500	364	20	76	66	87	1	153
2B	JJ Wetherholt, Cardinals (AAA)	22	.306	.421	.510	408	17	59	72	73	23	152
3B	Sal Stewart, Reds (AAA)	21	.309	.383	.524	437	20	80	46	77	17	152
SS	Konnor Griffin, Pirates (AA)	19	.333	.415	.527	484	21	94	50	122	65	165
OF	Dylan Beavers, Orioles (AAA)	23	.304	.420	.515	342	18	51	68	76	23	153
OF	Max Clark, Tigers (AA)	20	.271	.403	.432	431	14	67	94	90	19	148
OF	Eduardo Quintero, Dodgers (A+)	19	.293	.415	.508	433	19	69	88	123	47	153
DH	Kevin McGonigle, Tigers (AA)	20	.305	.408	.583	331	19	80	59	46	10	182

Pos	Pitcher, Org (Peak Level)	Age	W	L	ERA	G	IP	HR	BB	SO	WHIP	FIP
SP	Elmer Rodriguez-Cruz, Yankees (AAA)	21	11	8	2.58	27	150	3	57	176	1.07	2.47
SP	Robby Snelling, Marlins (AAA)	21	9	7	2.51	25	136	10	39	166	1.11	2.77
SP	Payton Tolle, Red Sox (AAA)	22	3	5	3.04	20	92	10	23	133	0.99	2.75
SP	Jonah Tong, Mets (AAA)	22	10	5	1.43	22	114	2	47	179	0.92	1.68
SP	Trey Yesavage, Blue Jays (AAA)	21	5	1	3.12	25	98	8	41	160	0.97	2.52
RP	Hayden Harris, Braves (AAA)	26	6	0	0.52	43	52	1	19	79	0.75	2.07

SECOND TEAM

Pos	Player, Org (Peak Level)	Age	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	wRC+
C	Carter Jensen, Royals (AAA)	21	.290	.377	.501	427	20	76	60	122	10	136
1B	Esmerlyn Valdez, Pirates (AA)	21	.286	.376	.520	458	26	86	56	130	3	156
2B	Michael Arroyo, Mariners (AA)	20	.262	.401	.433	450	17	54	69	104	12	139
3B	Jacob Reimer, Mets (AA)	21	.282	.379	.491	444	17	77	58	112	15	157
SS	Caleb Bonemer, White Sox (A+)	19	.281	.401	.473	385	12	64	75	101	29	151
OF	Carson Benge, Mets (AAA)	22	.281	.385	.472	441	15	73	68	92	22	150
OF	AJ Ewing, Mets (AA)	20	.315	.401	.429	485	3	55	68	105	70	147
OF	Ryan Waldschmidt, D-backs (AA)	22	.289	.419	.473	484	18	78	96	106	29	143
DH	Alfredo Duno, Reds (A)	19	.287	.430	.518	390	18	81	95	91	6	164

Pos	Pitcher, Org (Peak Level)	Age	W	L	ERA	G	IP	HR	BB	SO	WHIP	FIP
SP	David Davalillo, Rangers (AA)	22	6	4	2.44	23	107	6	28	126	0.93	2.81
SP	Connelly Early, Red Sox (AAA)	23	10	3	2.60	21	100	5	40	132	1.11	2.74
SP	Carlos Lagrange, Yankees (AA)	22	11	8	3.53	24	120	8	62	168	1.20	3.14
SP	TJ Nichols, Rays (AA)	23	14	3	2.90	25	134	21	30	156	1.02	3.90
SP	JR Ritchie, Braves (AAA)	22	8	6	2.64	26	140	12	54	140	1.01	3.84
RP	Welinton Herrera, Rockies (AA)	21	5	5	2.64	52	65	2	25	99	1.14	2.02

Baseball America
MINOR LEAGUE PITCHER OF THE YEAR
JONAH TONG

Mets righthander **Jonah Tong** learned a new Vulcan changeup grip and prospered with an all-time minor league pitching season

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

by **GEOFF PONTES**

Jonah Tong throws a Vulcan changeup.

Entering spring training, Jonah Tong knew he was ready to take a step forward.

After working in the offseason to add velocity and improve the quality of his changeup, the 22-year-old Mets righthander was about to unleash a level of dominance on the Eastern League not seen in some time.

Now, after making good on that preparation with a stellar season that saw Tong earn a callup to the Mets, he is the Minor League Pitcher of the Year.

A tweak in his changeup grip helped kick things off.

"I tried out a splitter in offseason camps and didn't like how it felt," Tong told Baseball America about his Vulcan-grip change. "So they suggested we try on top of the horseshoe."

That seam orientation made all the difference. Tong was able to create significant depth between his four-seam fastball and his primary offspeed pitch. With this tweak, Tong's changeup went from a third or even fourth pitch to the clear star of an arsenal that dominated opposing hitters in 2025, primarily with Double-A Binghamton.

Tong boosted his changeup usage and saw his whiff and chase numbers rise. He generated a whiff rate of 50.8% against his changeup in the minors this season, while generating a chase rate of 31.9%. He also showed the ability to command the pitch, with a 54.5% zone rate that was the highest in his arsenal.

Tong's new changeup grip, in tandem with a 3 mph bump in velocity on his fastball, helped push him up prospect rankings and into New York's major league rotation on Aug. 29. Tong, alongside fellow rookie righthanders Nolan McLean and Brandon Sproat, helped give the Mets a needed group of rotation reinforcements as they battled for their National League wild card lives.

While the results in Tong's initial five MLB starts were mixed, that wasn't the case in the minor leagues, which he thoroughly dominated. Over 22 starts spanning 113.2 innings, the final 11.2 for Triple-A Syracuse, Tong struck out 179 batters to lead the minor leagues—despite not making a single minor league start in September.

Tong's 1.43 ERA and .148 opponent average led all qualified minor league pitchers, making him the first pitcher since at least 1993—which is as far back as Baseball America officially tracks this info—to lead the entire minor leagues in those two categories along with strikeouts.

Discussions around Tong's arsenal have centered around his fastball and changeup combination—and for good reason. Tong's four-seam fastball sits 93-96 mph with plus ride and heavy cut, and it played as a plus, bat-missing pitch. It boasted a 35.6% whiff rate in the minors this season, which is a plus metric compared to his peers.

In fact, it was that fastball shape that initially drew the Mets to Tong when they drafted him out of Georgia Premier Academy in the seventh round in 2022.

In addition to the four-seam and changeup, Tong mixes a trio of breaking balls in an upper-70s, downer curveball, a low-80s, deathball-like slider and an upper-80s cutter. While much of his success this season is attributed to his fastball and changeup, his trio of breaking balls hints at a potentially deeper and more robust arsenal still to come.

Despite tremendous success this season, Tong still has his doubters as an undersized righthander with a high-effort operation reminiscent of former Cy Young Award winner Tim Lincecum. Tong, a native of Canada, grew up idolizing the former Giants star and modeled his operation after him.

The Mets debated whether to call up Tong this summer. On the one hand, he is just 22 years old and did not need to be added to the 40-man roster until after the 2026 season. On the other hand, he had little left to prove in the minors, while the Mets' big league rotation recorded a 4.72 ERA in July and August.

In five big league starts, Tong tended to run hot and cold. He struck out eight and walked none while allowing no earned runs in five innings versus the Padres. In another start, he allowed three solo home runs at Cincinnati but still navigated six innings. In his two worst starts, versus the Rangers and Cubs, Tong allowed 11 earned runs in 2.2 innings, generating six total whiffs.

In total, Tong's ERA was 7.71 through his first 18.2 big league innings, though his 25.3% strikeout rate was comfortably above the MLB average. Now, he knows what he has to improve this offseason to build on his tremendous 2025 minor league success and follow in Lincecum's footsteps as an aspiring ace. ■

MINOR LEAGUES, MAJOR DOMINANCE

No hits. No runs. No contact.

That neatly sums up Jonah Tong's season. The 22-year-old Mets righthander led all minor league pitchers in opponent average, ERA and strikeouts, making him perhaps the most unhittable minor league pitcher of the past 30-plus seasons.

Beginning in 1993, Baseball America began tracking the overall category leaders for the entire minor leagues, combining players' statistics at all levels.

In that time, Tong is the only one to lead the minors in ERA, strikeouts and opponent average. He's also the first to lead in just ERA and strikeouts. Here are all the pitchers since 1993 to lead the minors in at least two of those categories in the same season.

Season	Pitcher	Org	ERA	SO	AVG
2025	Jonah Tong	NYM	1.43	179	.148
2019	Cristian Javier	HOU	1.74		.130
2005	Francisco Liriano	MIN		204	.177
2003	John Maine	BAL		185	.177
2001	Josh Beckett	MIA	1.54		.170
1996	Britt Reames	STL	1.90		.170
1995	Glendon Rusch	KC	1.74		.188
1994	Billy Wagner	HOU		204	.188

Tong shares some similarities with Cristian Javier and John Maine as a four-seam fastball-dominant righthander who generates a high whiff rate on his riding heater while also drawing a lot of weak flyball and infield pop-up contact to suppress opponents' batting average.

MATT DIRKSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Baseball America
ROOKIE
OF THE YEAR
NICK
KURTZ

The Athletics never wavered in their conviction when scouting **Nick Kurtz**. Now, he stands at the center of the club's ascending position core.

by **JESÙS CANO**

BASH TO THE FUTURE

Nick Kurtz celebrates hitting his fourth home run in one game, July 25 in Houston.

They were the four swings heard round the baseball world. Yet for Athletics first baseman Nick Kurtz, that July night when he became the first rookie—and one of just 21 players ever—to slug four home runs in one game still feels like a blur.

To the A's organization, it was something else entirely. The first glint of a long-awaited light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. A moment that briefly dulled the pain of the fire sales, empty seats or the heartbreaking move to Sacramento ahead of a planned relocation to Las Vegas.

For the A's fans who endured the chaos and stayed when others walked away, it offered something rare: hope. Hope to keep following, to keep caring, even when the times are tough.

As the A's embark on a new chapter, they do so with a new foundation. At its center is Kurtz, the Baseball America Rookie of the Year.

More than just a cornerstone of transition, he is rapidly becoming one of the game's most formidable young sluggers. For A's fans who have waited so long, Kurtz represents the promise of a future that finally feels bright.

"He's been a revelation," said A's assistant GM Billy Owens. "He was No. 1 on our (draft) board. The numbers were overwhelming, and the picturesque swing was amazing. I made sure, right after the draft, that it was on record in multiple interviews: Nick Kurtz was No. 1 on our board going into that season."

Kurtz authored one of the most dominant rookie seasons the game has ever seen. He slashed .291/.384/.613 with 33 home runs in 111 games. He led all rookies in homers. Ditto his 81 RBIs and 83 runs. His .998 OPS ranks seventh-highest in history for a rookie with at least 450 plate appearances. His 168 wRC+ ranks fourth.

Kurtz's rapid rise becomes even more remarkable when one considers where he was a year prior to his four-homer game. He was wearing a Wake Forest uniform on a quiet Tuesday night road game at Elon. Twelve months later, he was anchoring a big league lineup, carrying the hopes of a franchise and proving why the Athletics made him the No. 4 pick in the 2024 draft.

Kurtz drew a Wake Forest-record 189 walks in his three seasons.

Even "revelation" might undersell what the 22-year-old meant before he even debuted in West Sacramento. Kurtz started the season with Triple-A Las Vegas and quite literally swung his way to the big leagues. In 20 games with the Aviators, he went 27-for-84 (.321) with seven home runs before earning his callup on April 23.

Kurtz knew his bat was making a case for him, but an April callup still felt far-fetched. His focus wasn't on the big leagues, but simply on playing the game.

"I didn't put too much pressure on myself," Kurtz said. "There were a lot of people who were saying, 'How early is he going to be up?' I was just present and enjoying time with the guys I played with in the Arizona Fall League or Double-A the year before."

It took some time for Kurtz to find his footing in the majors. The same dominance he showed at Triple-A didn't immediately translate, and he didn't hit his first home run until his 16th game. But once that ball left the yard, everything began to click.

And July? That was Nick Kurtz's coming-out party.

It wasn't just a hot streak. It was a month in which raw potential became reality. The rookie

Highest OPS By Rookie Batters

Minimum 450 plate appearances. Source: FanGraphs.com

	Team	Year	PA	AVG	OBP	SLG	OPS
Joe Jackson	CLE	1911	641	.408	.468	.590	**1.058**
Aaron Judge	NYY	2017	678	.284	.422	.627	**1.049**
Ted Williams	BOS	1939	677	.327	.436	.609	**1.045**
Albert Pujols	STL	2001	676	.329	.403	.610	**1.013**
Bernie Carbo	CIN	1970	467	.310	.454	.551	**1.004**
Ryan Braun	MIL	2007	492	.324	.370	.634	**1.004**
Nick Kurtz	ATH	2025	489	.290	.383	.619	**1.002**
Wally Berger	BSN	1930	625	.310	.375	.614	**.990**
Mark McGwire	OAK	1987	641	.289	.370	.618	**.987**
Hal Trosky	CLE	1934	685	.330	.388	.598	**.987**

TIM WARNER/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT), ISAIAH VAZQUEZ/GETTY IMAGES (ABOVE)

didn't just announce his arrival—he demanded attention. The four-homer game was the exclamation point.

"It's crazy how all that happened," Kurtz said. "A lot more people knew who I was after that game."

For many, those four swings were the moment Kurtz truly arrived. For Owens, though, they brought him back to the very first time he saw Kurtz play. Owens had seen the same easy power, the same smooth stroke, the same feeling that this was a hitter destined to change a franchise.

While Owens scouted Wake Forest standouts Rhett Lowder and Brock Wilken for the 2023 draft, a then-sophomore Kurtz stepped to the plate in the team's second game against Pittsburgh and unleashed a swing that silenced the ballpark. The sound of the bat echoed. The ball seemed to carry forever on its way out.

For Owens, who has spent 27 years in the game, it was one of the longest home runs he had ever seen.

The A's didn't draft Lowder or Wilken in 2023, but that trip still ended up shaping their future. With the sixth overall pick, they turned to Grand Canyon shortstop Jacob Wilson, a twitchy athlete with advanced bat-to-ball skills who quickly became the table-setter of their system.

And while Kurtz wouldn't be theirs until the following summer, the Athletics' first glimpse of him planted a seed. By the time the club was back on the clock in 2024, the organization saw a chance to pair Wilson's contact-driven game with Kurtz's thunderous power.

The A's already had Kurtz at the top of their board for 2024, but his junior season at Wake Forest erased any remaining doubt. He slashed .306/.531/.763 with 22 home runs, 57 RBIs and a 1.294 OPS, numbers that showcased both top-of-the-scale power and elite on-base ability.

OPPO JUICE

When Nick Kurtz hit four home runs in one game on July 25, three of the blasts were hit to the opposite field at Houston's Daikin Park.
In fact, most of the lefthanded-hitting Kurtz's 36 home runs this season were hit to left field. The rookie's slugging percentage to the opposite field is the highest of the ball-tracking era, dating back to 2008.

Highest Slugging Percentage To Opposite Field

Source: Baseball Savant Statcast search

	Team	Year	AB	HR	SLG
Nick Kurtz	ATH	2025	173	29	1.087
Aaron Judge	NYY	2025	242	39	1.041
Chris Davis	BAL	2013	202	32	1.030
JD Martinez	DET/ARI	2017	203	30	.980
Jim Thome	MIN	2010	113	17	.973
Ryan Howard	PHI	2008	219	33	.950
Aaron Judge	NYY	2023	132	24	.947
Aaron Judge	NYY	2019	148	21	.946
Aaron Judge	NYY	2017	201	29	.940
Ryan Howard	PHI	2009	217	28	.940

His 61 career home runs ranked second only to Wilken in program history, but no Wake Forest batter had ever drawn more walks than Kurtz and his 189.

His makeup in pre-draft meetings only strengthened that conviction. Owens and the rest of the A's scouting staff came away impressed not just with Kurtz's work ethic, but with the way he carried himself as a young man handling the spotlight.

For all the certainty inside the Athletics' draft room, Kurtz himself wasn't sure just how much they wanted him.

"I really didn't know until draft day that it was going to be them," Kurtz said. "I knew they had a bunch of interest. We had really good predraft meetings with them. They liked the way I approached it, the way I felt about hitting and the preparation I put in every day. It shows they had a lot of trust in me."

There was one roadblock—or three—ahead of the A's in their pursuit of Kurtz. The Guardians held the first pick in the 2024 draft, followed by the Reds and then Rockies. All the A's could do was hope Kurtz was available with the fourth pick. And as the draft happened, members of the A's scouting department held their breath with every pick announcement.

The Guardians selected Oregon State's Travis Bazzana at No. 1 overall. The Reds took Kurtz's Wake Forest teammate Chase Burns with the second pick. When the Rockies chose Georgia's Charlie Condon at No. 3, a big sigh of relief could be heard in the A's war room.

"Rarely do things just line up like that," Owens said. "Baseball is a sport where you're going to have peaks and valleys. For Nick Kurtz to be there at four was fortunate.

"Yeah, we were holding our breath."

Kurtz got the phone call he had been working toward his entire life, surrounded not only by his family but also by the friends and coaches who helped shape his journey. From his early days in Lancaster, Pa., to his development at the Baylor School in Chattanooga, Tenn., to his breakout at Wake Forest, each stop had built toward this moment.

A week later, the A's flew Kurtz and his family, including his parents Jeff and Marie and his three siblings Logan, Brandon and Grace, to California to sign his contract at the Oakland Coliseum.

The team treated the Kurtz family to lunch, at which a handful of A's front office staff were present, including GM David Forst, scouting director Eric Kubota and senior adviser Billy Beane. They reasserted the belief in their prize pick to create an impact as the club transitioned from Oakland to Las Vegas.

It was a gesture that went a long way

"That whole first-class treatment made us feel really special," Jeff Kurtz said. "It was important to them to have us there, and they wanted Nick to know. The whole situation has been run really well . . . We couldn't be happier with the way it turned out.

"He was drafted by the right team."

That trust carried into the start of Kurtz's professional career. When he reported to the Athletics' complex in Mesa, Ariz., he braced himself for a wave of adjustments, including mechanical tweaks, approach changes, the kind of tinkering many young hitters face.

> *“He’s been a revelation. He was No. 1 on our (draft) board. The numbers were overwhelming, and the picturesque swing was amazing. I made sure, right after the draft, that it was on record in multiple interviews: Nick Kurtz was No. 1 on our board going into that season.”*
>
> A’S ASSISTANT GM BILLY OWENS

Instead, the message from player development was simple

“They wanted me to be me,” Kurtz said. “I like having the freedom to do what I think, and if they find something wrong, they would come to me after the fact. It just shows the trust they have in me as a hitter and what they think I can do.”

If Kurtz’s rookie season was just a glimpse of what’s to come, then Athletics fans have plenty to look forward to. Kurtz knows the talent he brings, but he’s just as quick to acknowledge the importance of the teammates around him.

Whether it’s homegrown players such as Wilson, Lawrence Butler or Tyler Soderstrom or scouting finds such as Brent Rooker or Shea Langeliers, the group around him has pushed Kurtz to elevate his game.

Together, they’ve done more than just compete. They’ve laid the foundation for what comes next, whether in West Sacramento or Las Vegas. The A’s don’t just have players. They have a core.

And in Kurtz, they finally have a superstar to build around.

“You want to be excited to come into work every day,” Kurtz said. “It makes the tough times not as bad. You can come here, spend it with your guys, and (you) are grinding together and getting even closer as time goes on. I think we built a good, tight-knit group, and that will pay dividends throughout the future.” ■

2025 ALL-ROOKIE TEAM

Pos	Player	Team	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	HR	BB	SO	SB
C	Drake Baldwin	ATL	.274	.341	.469	405	19	38	68	0
1B	Nick Kurtz	ATH	.290	.383	.619	420	36	63	151	2
2B	Luke Keaschall	MIN	.302	.382	.445	182	4	19	29	14
3B	Matt Shaw	CHC	.226	.295	.394	393	13	38	94	17
SS	Jacob Wilson	ATH	.311	.355	.444	486	13	27	39	5
OF	Roman Anthony	BOS	.292	.396	.463	257	8	40	84	4
OF	Daylen Lile	WSH	.299	.347	.498	321	9	21	56	8
OF	Jakob Marsee	MIA	.292	.363	.478	209	5	22	48	14
DH	Colson Montgomery	CWS	.239	.311	.529	255	21	25	83	0

Pos	Pitcher	Team	ERA	G	IP	H	HR	BB	SO	WHIP
SP	Noah Cameron	KC	2.99	24	138	109	18	43	114	1.10
SP	Cade Horton	CHC	2.67	23	118	95	10	33	97	1.08
SP	Chad Patrick	MIL	3.53	27	120	113	13	40	127	1.28
SP	Cam Schlittler	NYY	2.96	14	73	58	8	31	84	1.22
SP	Will Warren	NYY	4.44	33	162	158	22	65	171	1.37
RP	Braydon Fisher	TOR	2.70	52	50	32	4	19	62	1.02

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Baseball America
MLB PLAYER
OF THE YEAR
AARON
JUDGE

IN A LEAGUE OF HIS OWN

With a bat in his hands, **Aaron Judge** has few peers, this year or in MLB history

by **MATT EDDY**

Aaron Judge has shown 80-grade power since his rookie season.

He hit 52 home runs in 2017, establishing a since-broken rookie record. That was just the tip of the iceberg. Since then, Judge:

- Hit 62 home runs in 2022 to establish an American League record.
- Topped 50 home runs four times, including in each of the past two seasons.
- Won the Best Power category in AL Best Tools voting five times. Only Mark McGwire has more first-place finishes in the Baseball America exercise, which dates back to 1988.
- Reached 300 home runs in just 955 games, the fastest pace in MLB history.

No hitter has more home runs or a higher slugging percentage than Judge since MLB resumed post-pandemic normalcy in 2021. Even more notable: In recent seasons the 33-year-old Yankees superstar has become an 80-grade hitter.

Judge is one of three qualified hitters to carry a .300 batting average since 2021—he trails only Luis Arraez and Freddie Freeman—while nobody can touch his .426 on-base percentage, not even Juan Soto, the king of walks.

Judge has always been selective at the plate, but in recent seasons he has hit the ball harder and kept it off the ground at a higher rate. This has driven a high expected batting average—and a much higher *actual* batting average.

Judge hit .272 through 2020, followed by a .306 mark in the five seasons since.

As an 80 hitter with 80 power, Judge has reached a level of hitting dominance seldom seen. For his incredible season—yet another one for the ages—he is the Baseball America Major League Player of the Year.

JOSE ALTUVE WINS MAJOR LEAGUE PLAYER OF THE YEAR

TOP 10 PROSPECTS FOR ALL SIX SHORT-SEASON LEAGUES

Baseball America

MAJORS ♦ MINORS ♦ DRAFT ♦ HIGH- ♦ INTERNATIONAL

YANKEES SLUGGER
AARON JUDGE
REWRITES THE
RECORD BOOK
TO BECOME OUR
ROOKIE
OF THE
YEAR

Aaron Judge followed up BA Rookie of the Year honors in 2017 with three Player of the Year wins.

A Lot Of Black Ink

Judge batted .331/.457/.688 with 53 home runs and 114 RBIs this season. He topped all MLB hitters in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging. He led with a 1.144 OPS, 9.7 bWAR and 215 OPS+. His 124 walks trailed only Soto.

Judge might have challenged for additional counting categories had he not missed 10 games in late July with a flexor strain in his right elbow. The injury limited him to DH in August and the first half of September, which constrained his ability to add additional defensive value in right field.

Slash Stat Triple Crown

Rarely does a hitter lead the major leagues in the three slash stats. Doing so requires one to rack up a lot of hits, take a lot of walks and hit a lot of home runs. Only the best hitters can truly excel in all three disciplines.

That describes Judge this season. He led all MLB hitters in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging. That had been accomplished just five times in a non-strike-shortened season since World War II. Judge brings the total to six.

HITTERS WHO LED MLB IN AVG/OBP/SLG ▪ POST WWII

Year	Player	Team	PA	H	BB	HR	AVG	OBP	SLG
1957	Ted Williams	BOS	547	163	119	38	.388	.526	.731
1980	George Brett	KC	515	175	58	24	.390	.454	.664
1999	Larry Walker	COL	513	166	57	37	.379	.458	.710
2002	Barry Bonds	SF	612	149	198	46	.370	.582	.799
2013	Miguel Cabrera	DET	652	193	90	44	.348	.442	.636
2025	**Aaron Judge**	NYY	679	179	124	53	.331	.457	.688

A Record Four 50-Homer Seasons

Babe Ruth

Despite all the historic sluggers in MLB history—and all the favorable hitting eras—reaching 50 home runs in a season is a rare feat.

Just 11 hitters in history have multiple 50-homer seasons. Judge now has four such seasons, which ties the all-time record. He is one of just four hitters in history to hit at least 50 in four different seasons.

Babe Ruth	Mark McGwire	Sammy Sosa	Aaron Judge
1920: 54	1996: 52	1998: 66	2017: 52
1921: 59	1997: 58	1999: 63	2022: 62
1927: 60	1998: 70	2000: 50	2024: 58
1928: 54	1999: 65	2001: 64	2025: 53

Ruth (1930), McGwire (1987) and Sosa (2002) all had seasons of 49 home runs, leaving them one longball short of a fifth 50-homer season.

Mark McGwire

ISHIKA SAMANT/GETTY IMAGES (JUDGE),

Best Peak Hitter Since Bonds

Baseball-Reference calculates that Judge had a 215 OPS+ this season, meaning he was 115% more productive than the average MLB hitter after accounting for his league and home ballpark.

Judge also produced an OPS+ greater than 200 in 2022 and 2024, his previous BA Major League Player of the Year seasons.

Taking a step back and analyzing Judge at his five-year peak, 2021 through 2025, reveals that he is in the midst of one of the most dominant stretches of hitting the game has ever seen. In the integration era, just Barry Bonds and Ted Williams were more productive over a span of five consecutive seasons.

HIGHEST OPS+ IN A FIVE-SEASON SPAN ▪ POST WWII

Minimum 2,500 plate appearances

Rk	Span	Player	OPS+
1.	2000-04	Barry Bonds	241
2.	1999-03	Barry Bonds	223
3.	1998-02	Barry Bonds	211
4.	1954-58	Ted Williams	198
5.	**2021-25**	**Aaron Judge**	196

Bonds

Because Judge produced "only" a 149 OPS+ in 2021, he has a chance to improve his peak five-year stretch with a 2026 season more in line with the 209 OPS+ he produced from 2022 to 2025.

Most Productive Righthanded Hitter Ever?

Many of the hitters cited in the groupings listed above batted lefthanded, including Barry Bonds, George Brett, Babe Ruth, Larry Walker and Ted Williams.

Lefthanded hitters bat with the platoon advantage, i.e. face righthanded pitchers, about 75% of the time. Righthanded hitters face the opposite situation. Judge has taken just 25% of his career plate appearances with the platoon advantage.

This creates a dynamic in which lefthanded batters tend to outperform righthanded ones on all-times rankings. Judge is an exception. He ranks fourth all-time in OPS+ for an MLB hitter with at least 3,000 plate appearances—and No. 1 among righthanded batters.

Rk	Batter	Bats	OPS+
1.	Babe Ruth	L	206
2.	Ted Williams	L	191
3.	Barry Bonds	L	182
4.	**Aaron Judge**	R	179
5.	Lou Gehrig	L	179
6.	Rogers Hornsby	R	175
7.	Mickey Mantle	B	172
8.	Joe Jackson	L	170
9.	Mike Trout	R	169
10.	Ty Cobb	L	168

Source: Baseball-Reference Stathead

MLB Player of the Year

FINALIST

THE CASE FOR CAL RALEIGH

by MATT EDDY

Catchers are just built differently.

And then there's Cal Raleigh.

The 28-year-old Mariners backstop did things in 2025 that would have seemed impossible a year ago. But Raleigh is just built differently.

Catchers rarely win major awards, mostly on account of playing time disadvantages and the blunting effect of the battering they take behind the plate.

Only Joe Mauer in 2009 and Buster Posey in 2012 have won the writers' MVP vote in the 21st century. In the expansion era, the list expands by just four names: Ivan Rodriguez in 1999, Thurman Munson in 1976, Johnny Bench in 1970 and '72 and Elston Howard in 1963.

Baseball America chose Aaron Judge as its Player of the Year, but it was not a unanimous decision. Here are the main pillars in the case for Cal Raleigh.

Season Shorthand

When fans reflect on the 2025 season, Raleigh's American League-leading 60 home runs will be one of its most memorable aspects. He also led the AL with 125 RBIs.

Raleigh's 60 homers are the most ever for a primary catcher, topping the 48 that Salvador Perez hit in 2021. Raleigh's .342 isolated slugging percentage is the highest ever for a primary catcher with 500 plate appearances, topping Roy Campanella in 1953 (.299) and Johnny Bench in 1970 (.294).

Raleigh also holds the single-season home run record for a player in the lineup at catcher. He hit 49 of his 60 homers while playing catcher, topping the 42 Javy Lopez hit in 2003. Campanella, Todd Hundley and Mike Piazza (twice) are the only other players ever to reach 40 homers in a season while in the lineup at catcher.

Another historical signifier for Raleigh's season is team success. He helped the Mariners to 90 wins and their first AL West title since 2001.

Catcher Value

No player on the field takes more of a licking and keeps on ticking than the catcher.

He takes foul balls off the face mask, off the hands and off the thighs. He risks getting struck by batters' back swings. Breaking balls in the dirt can bounce unpredictably and evade his body armor.

Catchers also play a key role in game-planning and preparing plans of attack for opposing hitters. He must also build rapport with the 13 pitchers on his team's pitching staff, plus more than a dozen more when accounting for callups and fill-ins.

In Raleigh's case, he is more than just a player whose position happens to be catcher. He is a strong defender as well. Raleigh ranks fifth in Statcast framing runs this season and above-average in terms of throwing out basestealers.

Because pitch framing is such a crucial skill for catchers, Raleigh is assessed as a huge defensive asset—87th percentile—via Statcast overall fielding runs.

Switch-Hitting Value

Raleigh exceeds from both sides of the plate at a time when switch-hitting is on the wane.

Switch-hitters took 20,594 plate appearances in 2025, the fourth-lowest total of the 30-team era, trailing only the 2024, 2023 and 2021 seasons. Raleigh and other switch-hitting stars such as Jose Ramirez, Francisco Lindor and Ketel Marte are keeping the art alive.

Switch-hitters have to work daily to refine two swings rather than one. Even though a switch-hitter will use his righthanded swing only about 25% of the time, he must be ready to use it in case he faces a lefthanded reliever in a game started by a righthanded pitcher.

That takes a level of preparation and dedication that is not required for a player who bats from only one side of the plate.

Elite hitters such as Aaron Judge or Shohei Ohtani are, by definition, elite versus pitchers of both hands, but among mere mortals, Raleigh's switch-hitting boosts his value.

This season, Raleigh obliterated Mickey Mantle's 61-year-old record for home runs by a switch-hitter. Mantle hit 54 homers in 1961 and 52 in 1956. Before this year, those were the only two 50-homer seasons by a switch-hitter.

But Raleigh's accomplishment goes deeper than overall home runs total. This year he became the first player in MLB history to hit at least 20 home runs from both sides of the plate in a season. He hit 38 homers with a .909 OPS versus righthanders and 22 homers with a 1.032 OPS versus lefthanders.

Incredibly, Raleigh has a .798 OPS from both sides of the plate for his career.

Park Factor

Seattle's T-Mobile Park is the toughest hitter's park in MLB in terms of runs scored. It is well below-average for home runs but not the very worst.

Mariners players also have the roughest travel schedule in MLB because Seattle is geographically isolated from all other team clusters.

These effects had no impact on Raleigh's raw production this season. He produced a .999 OPS in road games and an .893 mark at T-Mobile. This is consistent with his career norms.

Raleigh overcame his home park and travel rigors to set the Mariners franchise record for home runs, bettering Griffey Jr., a Hall of Famer who hit 56 in both 1997 and '98.

KAREN WARREN/HOUSTON CHRONICLE VIA GETTY IMAGES (BONDS), RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (TROUT), SYDNEY SCHNEIDER/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (JUDGE), ALIKA JENNER/GETTY IMAGES (RALEIGH)

Skenes

Skubal

MAJOR LEAGUE ALL-STAR TEAM

capsules by **MATT EDDY**

After the curtain fell on another outstanding MLB season, Baseball America named its 2025 all-stars.

Among the things the 2025 season will be remembered for are power, speed and, well, power.

- A record seven players went 30-30: Corbin Carroll, Jazz Chisholm Jr., Pete Crow-Armstrong, Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez, Julio Rodriguez and Juan Soto. Four of those players made our MLB all-star teams.
- Aaron Judge, Shohei Ohtani, Cal Raleigh and Kyle Schwarber all hit 50 or more home runs, tying the record for most players in a season to reach the half-century mark. All four made our MLB all-star teams.

C CAL RALEIGH, MARINERS

Sixty! Raleigh shattered Salvador Perez's four-year-old record for home runs in a season by a catcher, hitting 60 in 158 games for the AL West division champions. Raleigh also set records for home runs by a switch-hitter (Mickey Mantle, 54) and by a Mariners hitter (Ken Griffey Jr., 56).

1B NICK KURTZ, ATHLETICS

Rare is the rookie who makes our MLB all-star team, but Kurtz was just that good as a first-year big leaguer—and in his second pro season, no less. The 22-year-old was one of just 13 rookies in history to hit 35 or more home runs in a season and one of just seven to post an OPS of 1.000 or better in a rookie season of at least 450 plate appearances.

2B KETEL MARTE, DIAMONDBACKS

Marte moved ahead of Jose Altuve as the top offensive second baseman in baseball in 2023 and kept up the pace by turning in a typically strong season this year. He hit for average, drew walks and slugged .500 for the third time in his career in a qualifying season.

3B JOSE RAMIREZ, GUARDIANS

Ramirez authored his third career 30-30 season and his second in a row. He is one of the most well-rounded players in MLB and one of the most multi-dimensional third

JUSTIN EDMONDS/GETTY IMAGES (SKENES), JOE SULLIVAN/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (SKUBAL), ADAM HUNGER/GETTY IMAGES (SOTO)

basemen in history. His 287 career stolen bases are the most for a third baseman of the live-ball era.

SS BOBBY WITT JR., ROYALS

Witt didn't hit as many home runs, drive in as many runs or draw as many walks as he did in his MVP runner-up season in 2024. But he set the bar so ridiculously high last year that it obscures the fact that Witt does things on the field at levels not seen at shortstop since Alex Rodriguez was in his prime 20 years ago.

OF AARON JUDGE, YANKEES

The incomparable Judge topped 50 home runs for a fourth time—tying the record—and became the sixth hitter since World War II to win the overall major league batting title while also leading MLB in on-base percentage and slugging. The others: Ted Williams, George Brett, Larry Walker, Barry Bonds and Miguel Cabrera.

OF JULIO RODRIGUEZ, MARINERS

Rodriguez's combination of power, speed, fielding chops, arm strength and availability make him baseball's best center fielder. The 24-year-old just completed his second 30-30 season in four tries. He and Bobby Witt Jr. are the only two hitters ever to do that twice before turning 25.

OF JUAN SOTO, METS

Soto signed a record contract and set new personal standards with 43 home runs and 38 stolen bases, more than triple his previous best, while leading the NL with a .396 on-base percentage and setting the Mets franchise record with 126 walks.

DH SHOHEI OHTANI, DODGERS

Ohtani set a career high with 55 home runs, scored 146 runs in 158 games and led the NL with a 1.104 OPS. He returned to the mound in mid June and made 14 starts, logging a 2.87 ERA with 62 strikeouts in 47 innings. Ohtani is set to bring his unprecedented two-way game to the postseason for the first time after toiling with the Angels for six seasons and serving as DH-only last October.

SP HUNTER BROWN, ASTROS

Brown continued to see results from emphasizing his sinker to righthanded batters and set career marks with a 28.3% strikeout rate, 7.8% walk rate and 2.43 ERA over a career high 185.1 innings.

Soto

SP GARRETT CROCHET, RED SOX

After watching the White Sox manage Crochet's workload carefully in 2024, the Red Sox set him loose on the American League. He proved he was a No. 1 starter for a playoff team with his MLB-leading 255 strikeouts and was one of three pitchers to top 200 innings this season.

SP CRISTOPHER SANCHEZ, PHILLIES

Throwing one of the best changeups in the game and generating one of the highest groundball rates helped elevate Sanchez to his best season yet. He set new career standards with a 26.3% strikeout rate, 5.5% walk rate and 2.50 ERA, all while becoming one of three pitchers to top 202 innings this season.

SP PAUL SKENES, PIRATES

From Rookie of the Year in 2024 to likely National League Cy Young Award winner this year, Skenes is on the short list of top young aces in history. He struck out more than 200 batters with an ERA under 2.00, becoming the seventh pitcher since 2000 to accomplish the feat. The 23-year-old Skenes is by far the youngest.

SP TARIK SKUBAL, TIGERS

Skubal won the Best Changeup category unanimously in AL Best Tools voting this year, and that's fitting because it generated the most Statcast run value of any individual pitch this season. His 0.89 WHIP was lowest in MLB among qualified starters, while only Paul Skenes bettered his 2.21 ERA.

RP AROLDIS CHAPMAN, RED SOX

The 37-year-old Chapman remains about as dominant as he was a decade ago—and notably as available despite his role as a reliever tending to be one subject to early burnouts. During one 17-game stretch this season, he was literally unhittable. From July 26 to Sept. 7, Chapman struck out 21, walked four and allowed zero hits over 14.2 innings.

FIRST TEAM

Pos	Player, Team	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	HR	R	RBI	BB	SO	SB	wRC+
C	Cal Raleigh, Mariners	.247	.359	.589	596	60	110	125	97	188	14	161
1B	Nick Kurtz, Athletics	.290	.383	.619	420	36	90	86	63	151	2	170
2B	Ketel Marte, D-backs	.283	.376	.517	480	28	87	72	64	83	4	145
3B	Jose Ramirez, Guardians	.283	.360	.503	593	30	103	85	66	74	44	133
SS	Aaron Judge, Yankees	.331	.457	.688	541	53	137	114	124	160	12	204
OF	Bobby Witt Jr., Royals	.295	.351	.501	623	23	99	88	49	125	38	130
OF	Julio Rodriguez, Mariners	.267	.324	.474	652	32	106	95	44	152	30	126
OF	Juan Soto, Mets	.263	.396	.525	577	43	120	105	127	137	38	156
DH	Shohei Ohtani, Dodgers	.282	.392	.622	611	55	146	102	109	187	20	172

Pos	Pitcher, Team	W	L	ERA	G	IP	H	HR	BB	SO	WHIP	FIP
SP	Hunter Brown, Astros	12	9	2.43	31	185	133	17	57	206	1.03	3.14
SP	Garrett Crochet, Red Sox	18	5	2.59	32	205	165	24	46	255	1.03	2.89
SP	Cristopher Sanchez, Phillies	13	5	2.50	32	202	171	12	44	212	1.06	2.55
SP	Paul Skenes, Pirates	10	10	1.97	32	188	136	11	42	216	0.95	2.36
SP	Tarik Skubal, Tigers	13	6	2.21	31	195	141	18	33	241	0.89	2.45
RP	Aroldis Chapman, Red Sox	5	3	1.17	67	61	28	3	15	85	0.70	1.73

SECOND TEAM

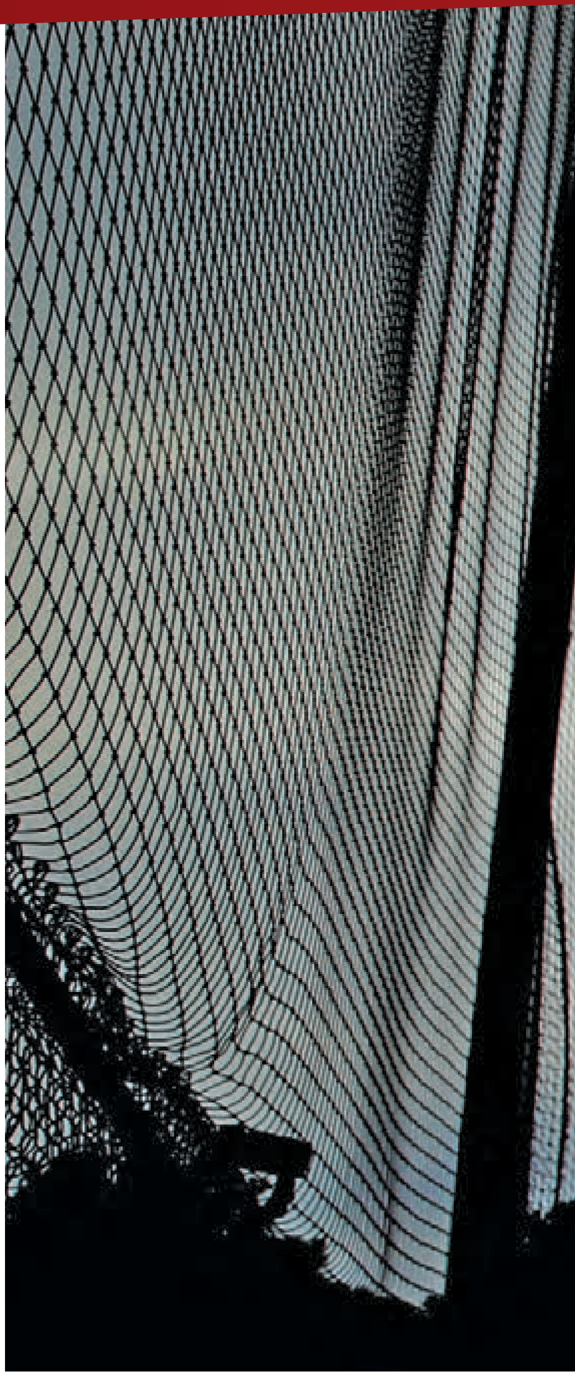
Pos	Player, Team	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	HR	R	RBI	BB	SO	SB	wRC+
C	Will Smith, Dodgers	.296	.404	.497	362	17	64	61	64	89	2	153
1B	Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Blue Jays	.292	.381	.467	589	23	96	84	81	94	6	137
2B	Brice Turang, Brewers	.288	.359	.435	584	18	97	81	66	150	24	124
3B	Maikel Garcia, Royals	.286	.351	.449	595	16	81	74	62	84	23	121
SS	Geraldo Perdomo, D-backs	.290	.389	.462	597	20	98	100	94	83	27	138
OF	Byron Buxton, Twins	.264	.327	.551	488	35	97	83	41	148	24	136
OF	Corbin Carroll, D-backs	.259	.343	.541	564	31	107	84	67	153	32	139
OF	George Springer, Blue Jays	.309	.399	.560	498	32	106	84	69	111	18	166
DH	Kyle Schwarber, Phillies	.240	.365	.563	604	56	111	132	108	197	10	152

Pos	Pitcher, Team	W	L	ERA	G	IP	H	HR	BB	SO	WHIP	FIP
SP	Max Fried, Yankees	19	5	2.86	32	195	164	14	51	189	1.10	3.07
SP	Freddy Peralta, Brewers	17	6	2.70	33	177	124	21	66	204	1.08	3.65
SP	Logan Webb, Giants	15	11	3.22	34	207	210	14	46	224	1.24	2.60
SP	Zack Wheeler, Phillies	10	5	2.71	24	150	107	19	33	195	0.94	3.00
SP	Yoshinobu Yamamoto, Dodgers	12	8	2.49	30	174	113	14	59	201	0.99	2.94
RP	Jhoan Duran, Phillies	7	6	2.06	72	70	58	3	19	80	1.10	2.35

SUMMER SLIDE

Inside college summer leagues' fight for survival in the transfer portal era

by JACOB RUDNER



The email landed in midwinter, polite and plain. It was the kind of request the summer league official had read a hundred times before.

"Dear (league official)," it began. "My name is (redacted) and I was wondering if you had any spots available for me to pitch this summer. I would love to send you some film for you to watch and put you in touch with my college coach."

The official replied within minutes. No openings, he explained, but a reserve slot was possible. The player didn't hesitate to jump at the chance.

"Of course," he responded.

What followed were the familiar calls, texts and emails that go into summer roster building. Only this time, the league official's communications went unanswered by the player's coach, a departure from typical workflow. Weeks passed. Eventually, the official broke the news: He couldn't sign the player to a summer league contract.

That's when the player made his next move.

"I'm entering the transfer portal," he said. "Can I join now?"

With no coach to block his summer plans, the process moved quickly. Flights were booked, housing was secured and introductions were made. Hours later, the phone rang again. The player had verbally committed to a new school, and his new coach didn't want him playing.

In the churn of summer baseball, nothing stays settled for long.

The summer league director of player personnel had an answer: "I said, 'Listen, I'm just telling you right now, any good baseball person who tells you that not playing baseball is good for you doesn't have your best interest in mind.' "

Still, no minds were changed. Plans—or the lack thereof—remained firm. The player stayed home that summer, joining a growing list of college players who did the same.

Few college coaches who spoke with Baseball America on the condition of anonymity denied that reality. In a landscape where loyalty to programs can be fickle at best, summer ball has become less an opportunity to improve than it is a showcase for coaches looking to pluck talent from other teams to bolster their own rosters.

"Ever since the transfer portal picked up and became what it is, I think coaches started operating under the belief that home is the safest place for their players to be and train," the summer league official said. "College coaches want summer ball to exist as a place to find talent, not a place to send talent.

"To them, sending talent out is a risk."

This notion is at the core of growing frustration for summer league managers, officials and team personnel, many of whom have served in their respective roles long enough to see the transition firsthand.

Players who once spent full seasons in summer wood bat leagues now only pass through briefly, if they go at all. It's a trend that, in the eyes of several league administrators and scouts, has eroded the quality of what was once a fertile proving ground, while also putting significant strain on teams scrambling to fill and maintain rosters throughout a season.

The numbers back it up. In some of the country's most tradition-rich hubs, such as the Cape Cod, Northwoods and Coastal Plain leagues, officials say roster volatility has never been higher. Players sign, report, make a handful of appearances and then vanish back home on the word of a coach, personal trainer or private pitching guru.

One league general manager charted his team's trend over the last decade and found that rosters that used to turn over nine or 10

MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

players in a summer now routinely shuffle through 20.

"It's survival mode," another league official said. "You're not building a team anymore. You're patching a boat."

College coaches insist they still want their players competing in the summer, but few shied away from the fact that they wanted it to be on their terms.

Many request ultra-specific pitch counts or innings limits. A few avoid summer ball entirely for returning pitchers, especially those who could shoulder heavy workloads in the spring.

As one Southeastern Conference assistant put it: "I don't need my Friday guy trying to prove something in a wood bat league in July."

At the same time, coaches are watching everyone else's players closely.

Several summer league administrators said they now send weekly stat sheets directly to college coaches, some of whom use the information less to track their own rosters than to identify potential transfer targets.

"It's kind of the worst-kept secret," a Power Four conference recruiting coordinator said. "You go to the Cape now and half the time you're not watching your own kid. You're watching someone else's and (hoping) he jumps in the portal."

As such, some coaches feel the need to play defense.

"I went out to (watch several of my players) this summer and, as much as I was there to see how they were doing, I was also there to make sure my guys stayed my guys," one mid-major head coach said.

That protective mindset has produced a squeeze that has been particularly apparent even in the Cape Cod League, which has long been considered the gold standard of collegiate

"Schools want to send out their hitters—they all want their hitters to get better—but **no one wants to send out quality pitching,** *because they're afraid the quality pitching won't come back," a summer league head coach said. "But you need someone to throw to the hitters."*

Division I first-round picks who played summer ball heading into their draft years

Now

60% in 2025

Then

77% in 2018

summer wood bat leagues.

In 2018, 53 players logged at least 100 at-bats on the Cape. That number cratered to 25 in 2023 and ticked up only slightly to 29 in 2025. On the mound, the downturn has been even more severe: 58 pitchers reached 20 innings in 2018 while just 25 did the same this summer.

The dip in participation is reflected at the highest levels, too. Just 60% of Division I first-round picks in 2025 played in a summer league, including time spent with USA Baseball's Collegiate National Team, the year before their draft season. That compares to 77% in 2018, the year the transfer portal was installed.

"We have successfully convinced baseball players that playing baseball is no longer good for them," one league official said. "Kids come here looking to showcase themselves for the portal. They get the offer, the love, the NIL promise—and they go home."

Added an official from another league: "The carousel of players is pretty much unprecedented in the last few years. It's a completely different product than it's ever been."

The concern, administrators say, extends far beyond entertainment value—it's an existential business problem.

Summer leagues are built on nightly gates, community sponsors and the promise of stability to host families and local operators. When talent flees early—sometimes in waves—the quality of baseball drops, teams slump toward sub-.500 records with replacement players and crowds thin.

One official described July attendance this year as "the quietest I can remember," attributing it largely to recognizable names disappearing before the stretch run.

"You take away the best players, you take away the draw," another GM said. "And once fans stop showing up, everything else starts to wobble—concessions, merchandise, sponsorships, even host family willingness the next summer. It's not just wins and losses. It's the whole ecosystem."

To combat the churn, leagues have begun experimenting with drastic fixes. One director said his schedule has already been slashed from 58 games down to 48—a deliberate psychological ploy.

"My sell to all the coaches and the players is, 'You'll be home the very first few days of August,' " he said. "We purposely keep it just June and July, so the player doesn't have to hear the word August."

Still, coaches are pushing for even shorter summers.

Others have floated the potential for reserving summer roster spots only for hitters, while pulling back on pitching altogether, an idea met with skepticism.

"Schools want to send out their hitters—they all want their hitters to get better—but no one wants to send out quality pitching, because they're afraid the quality pitching won't come back," a summer league head coach said. "But you need someone to throw to the hitters."

At this point, even administrators admit they're running out of answers.

"They know there is a very real problem, and they are at a loss for what to do," a league director said. "We want to come fish, but we don't necessarily want to give you the fish to help everyone else."

The consequences, officials warn, may arrive sooner than most realize. Smaller wood bat leagues without significant financial backing are already bracing for what comes next.

College programs continuing to fish from summer leagues without supplying players of their own and continuing to pull talent out midseason or refusing to send it at all threatens to destabilize the entire model. The nightly show summer leagues have put on for decades becomes tougher to stage.

As one longtime administrator put it, if coaches keep treating summer ball solely as a place to scout talent rather than develop it, "the pond simply won't survive."

"I think you're going to see some (leagues) say they can't live like this because they have to put on a show every night," one official said. "You need the players to put on a show.

"And if you don't have the players—you don't have the quality of players—sooner or later someone is going to ask, 'What are we doing this for?' " ■

GAME CHANGER

Division I transfer portal surge reshapes college baseball at historic rates

by JACOB RUDNER

LSU transfers Tommy White (left) and Paul Skenes in 2023.

College baseball's landscape has shifted dramatically in the past decade, with the transfer portal redefining roster construction.

What was once a slow churn of attrition and replacement is now a high-volume cycle of arrivals, departures and internal battles that shape depth charts.

The most striking trend is volume. Since the portal's inception in 2018, entries have climbed every year. When the 2025 window opened on June 2, more than 1,500 Division I players had filed their paperwork by the next morning—doubling the first-day total from last year. It was the latest surge in a system that continues to flood coaches with options to retool rosters overnight.

Critics often frame the portal as a mechanism that tilts power toward the giants—and there is some truth to that—but its reach extends far beyond perennial powers. The portal has become a universal marketplace, one that touches nearly every program and reshapes competition at every level of the sport.

Programs that reach Omaha increasingly do so with the help of transfers, often in ways that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

LSU offers a clear case study. When the Tigers captured the national championship in 2023, their roster featured just seven Division I transfers. The headliners—Paul Skenes and Tommy White—were so impactful that they masked the relatively modest volume, but the broader makeup of that roster still leaned on players developed in-house.

Two years later, the picture is strikingly different for the national champs. In 2025, LSU carried 14 Division I transfers, accounting for 35% of its roster. Jay Johnson's team was still stocked with blue-chip recruits, but the scale of outside additions illustrates how much the transfer portal has become embedded in roster design, even for the most resource-rich programs.

And LSU is hardly alone.

Across the Southeastern Conference, the reliance on transfers has reached staggering levels. Georgia led the league with 19 Division I transfers on its roster in 2025, while Kentucky followed close behind at 18.

Programs like Alabama, South Carolina and Texas A&M all landed in the low teens, with 13 apiece. Even traditional recruiting powers such as Florida (nine), Tennessee (eight) and Vanderbilt (nine) carried significant transfer totals—proof that the portal has become a core component of roster-building strategy regardless of a program's recruiting pull.

All told, the average SEC roster in 2025 featured more than 11 Division I transfers, a figure that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.

SEC ROSTERED TRANSFER TOTALS, 2025

Georgia	19
Kentucky	18
LSU	14
Alabama	13
South Carolina	13
Texas A&M	13
Auburn	11
Texas	10
Arkansas	10
Florida	9
Vanderbilt	9
Mississippi State	9
Missouri	8
Mississippi	8
Tennessee	8
Oklahoma	5

It's a reflection of the SEC's arms race: a conference that already dominates in facilities, recruiting and NIL resources now adds the portal as another lever to maintain its grip on the sport.

The margins for young players to break through in this environment have grown thinner, while the expectation for instant contribution has only intensified.

The trend extends well beyond the SEC, too.

The rate of transfer entry is rising everywhere, and its imprint is just as clear at the mid-major level.

Each of the four mid-major programs that finished the season ranked in the Top 25 saw a dramatic rise in its transfer totals compared to 2019, the first full season after the portal opened.

Coastal Carolina carried seven Division I transfers in 2025 after rostering only one in 2019.

Murray State, one of this year's surprise Omaha qualifiers, listed seven compared to three six years ago.

Texas-San Antonio's jump was even sharper, with 10 Division I transfers in 2025 versus a lone rostered transfer in 2019.

And Southern Mississippi, which did not roster a single Division I transfer in 2019, had five suit up for it this season.

MID-MAJOR TRANSFER GROWTH: 2019 VS. 2025

School	2019	2025
Coastal Carolina	1	7
Murray State	3	7
Texas-San Antonio	1	10
Southern Miss	0	5

The portal has done more than reshape the balance of power at the top—it has become a key mechanism for roster construction. Mid-majors use it to plug holes and remain competitive against the NCAA elite, while power programs use it to layer experience on top of elite recruiting classes.

The effect is a transfer-driven ecosystem that touches nearly every corner of Division I baseball.

So why does this all matter?

"This is killing high school recruiting," one current Division I recruiting coordinator said. "What we're looking for now is so different than what we were looking for a decade ago, maybe even less than that to be honest. We just don't have the roster spots."

That sentiment captures the heart of the shift. The volume of transfers entering Division I programs each year has compressed opportunities for high school players, changing how staffs evaluate prospects and allocate scholarships. Coaches who once leaned on projecting development over three or four years now prioritize players who can contribute immediately, especially if they come from another four-year program.

The downstream effects ripple across college baseball. Roster churn has become a defining feature of the calendar, forcing both players and programs to think in shorter windows than ever before.

And the acceleration isn't slowing down.

This offseason alone, 61 Division I programs took at least 10 transfer commitments, with 12 of them adding 15 or more. Just a year ago, just 36 teams reached double-digits. In 2023, that number was 20. The trend line is steep, and it underscores how rapidly the portal has gone from supplemental tool to central mechanism in roster construction.

That shift doesn't just change who is on the field—it changes how college baseball operates. Coaches now budget roster space differently, high school recruiting has been squeezed and the balance between patience and instant production tilts harder every year toward the latter.

It all adds up to a sport where roster stability is the exception, not the rule. The transfer era has created opportunity for players and flexibility for programs, but it has also introduced volatility, pressure and a new kind of arms race. What was once a gradual cycle of growth and development is now a high-speed marketplace. ■

MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES (LEFT), MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (WHITE, SKENES)

TOP 10 NEWCOMER CLASSES

TOP NEW TALENT ON CAMPUS

by PETER FLAHERTY

With school starting back up in the fall, players and coaches return to campus. Fall ball is on the horizon.

Every program has its fair share of newcomers—players who were added via the transfer portal, or high school players who made it to campus—so we will be taking a closer look at the top 10 newcomer classes heading into the 2026 season.

Joey Volchko brings his live arm from Stanford to Georgia.

#1 GEORGIA

Georgia has proven it can navigate the portal as well as any team. Things were no different in 2025—and it may have been the Bulldogs' best transfer class yet. While Georgia hasn't made the College World Series since 2008, this year's portal class certainly gives coach Wes Johnson's squad Omaha upside in 2026.

The Bulldogs top newcomer is RHP **Joey Volchko**, who might have the best pure stuff in the 2026 draft class. He has a live arm, but command has been a bugaboo in each of his first two seasons at Stanford. Fellow former Cardinal RHP **Matt Scott** opted to head to Georgia for his senior season instead of turning pro, while RHP **Caden Aoki**—one of the best strike-throwers in the country—also will compete for a spot in the weekend rotation.

Georgia also added a number of big-time bats. **Bryce Calloway** and **Kenny Ishikawa** are in line to make an impact as two-way players, while C **Jack Arcamone**—who drew plenty of draft interest—and SS **Ryan Wynn** give the Bulldogs two quality up-the-middle pieces.

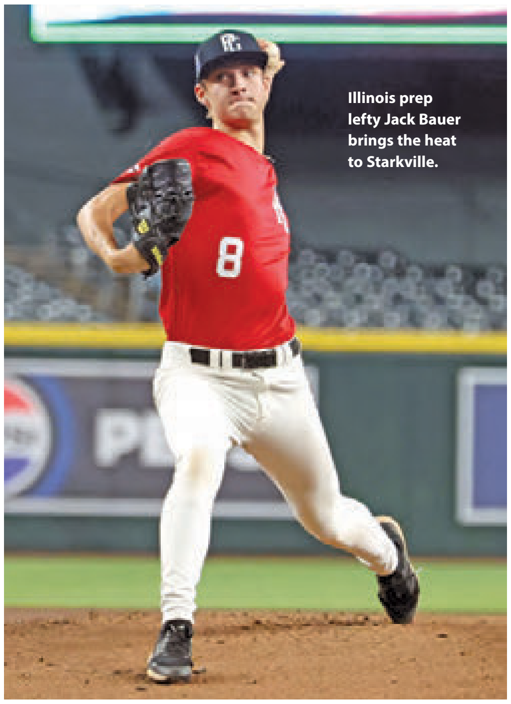
In addition to its premier portal class, Georgia also welcomes a pair of high-level freshmen in RHP **Joe Nottingham** (No. 159) and OF **Ty Peeples** (192). Nottingham has been up to 95 mph, while Peeples has flashed solid thump from the left side.

#2 MISSISSIPPI STATE

Following the departure of coach Chris Lemonis, Mississippi State made a splash when it hired former Virginia coach Brian O'Connor. O'Connor and his staff quickly put together one of the best portal classes in the country.

A number of O'Connor's better players from UVA—OFs **James Nunnallee**, and **Aidan Teel** and LHP **Tomas Valincius**—followed him to Starkville. Other notable transfers include 1B **Blake Bevis**, OF **Vytas Valincius**—brother of Tomas—and 3B **Drew Wyers**. All profile as key pieces offensively, while RHP **Tyler Pitzer**, who is fresh off Cape Cod League pitcher of the year honors; RHP **Jackson Logar** and RHP **Maddox Webb** are all expected to log meaningful innings.

Led by flame-throwing LHP **Jack Bauer** (No. 44), MSU recruited a deep class. The Bulldogs also welcome OF **Jacob Parker** (116), twin brother of Toronto first-rounder JoJo, as well as RHPs **Parker Rhodes** (202) and **Tanner Beliveau** (262) and C **Peter Mershon** (225).


Illinois prep lefty Jack Bauer brings the heat to Starkville.

Slugger Henry Ford transfers from Virginia to Tennessee.

#3 TENNESSEE

Tennessee annually puts together one of the most impressive newcomer classes in the nation. This year was no exception.

The Volunteers' biggest fish was undoubtedly star OF **Henry Ford**. He enjoyed an excellent spring at Virginia and had legitimate top-two rounds interest in the 2025 draft. Former Bowling Green C **Garrett Wright** had one of the best seasons of any mid-major hitter and will both catch and rove the outfield for the Volunteers, while 1B **Blaine Brown's** plus pull-side power profiles nicely at hitter-friendly Lindsey Nelson Stadium.

RHP **Landon Mack** is the headliner on the pitching side, though pitchability LHP **Evan Blanco** will also compete for a weekend starting role. Sidewinder **Brady Frederick** and RHP **Bo Rhudy** have a chance to be two of the better relievers in the SEC.

Coach Tony Vitello and his staff have a number of freshmen at their disposal. Six-foot-5 LHP **Cameron Appenzeller** (No. 52) has the highest ceiling of any incoming freshman Volunteer, while C **Trent Grindlinger** (100) has a plus arm to go along with above-average raw power.

#4 VIRGINIA

When coach Brian O'Connor left for Mississippi State, Virginia turned to former Duke coach Chris Pollard.

As a result, Virginia snagged the top overall transfer: former Duke OF **AJ Gracia** as well as former Blue Devil LHP **Henry Zatkowski**. Former Rider 2B **Joe Tiroly** projects to slot into the middle of the order, while C **Noah Jouras** is expected to help fill the void behind the dish left by Jacob Ference. The biggest sleeper in Virginia's crop of newcomers is LHP **Frank Willius**, a transfer from Division III California Lutheran. This spring he struck out 53 in 32.2 innings and features a fastball up to 94 mph along with a promising slider.

In what's become the norm in Charlottesville, Virginia again has a fantastic recruiting class. Its headliners are a trio of big-time RHPs in **Jayden Stroman** (No. 132), the younger brother of Marcus; **Noah Yoder** (136) and **John Paone**. Each has the stuff to make an immediate impact. Meanwhile, outfielders **William Mahala** (218) and **Griffin Enis** (258) have exciting tools, while C **Thomas O'Connell** (266) has an intriguing hit-power combination to go along with solid defensive skills.

AJ Gracia followed coach Chris Pollard from Duke To Virginia.

EAKIN HOWARD/GETTY IMAGES (VOLCHKO), BILL MITCHELL (BAUER), EDDIE KELLY (FORD, GRACIA)

TOP 10 NEWCOMER CLASSES

#5 LSU

With two national titles in the last three seasons, LSU has cemented itself as the top program. Under the guidance of coach Jay Johnson and his staff, the Tigers are one of the only teams to have seemed to figure out the "wild west" transfer portal environment.

A trio of transfer sluggers in 3B **Trent Caraway**, 1B **Seth Dardar** and 1B **Zach Yorke** all figure to slide into prominent roles offensively. Johnson also went out and got a handful of intriguing arms who are in line to take on similarly important roles. LHPs **Santi Garcia** and **Danny Lachenmayer** both ranked inside the top 50 on this year's top 100 transfers list, while former Kansas RHP **Cooper Moore** makes his way to campus after having his fair share of draft buzz.

LSU's recruiting class this year is led by **Omar Serna**, an ultra-physical catcher who has plenty of raw power and arm strength. OF **William Patrick** (No. 95) provides an exciting blend of *now* tools, athleticism and physicality, while RHP **Marcos Paz** (150) has flashed a fastball that's been up to 96 mph with a high-spin slider.

Danny Lachenmayer brings his riding fastball from North Dakota State to LSU.

Auburn freshman Ethin Bingaman starred for SoCal power Corona High.

#6 AUBURN

Following a down year in 2024 in which it failed to make the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2019, Auburn returned to form last season and went to a super regional for the first time since 2022. The Tigers—between their new and returning personnel—are positioned for a period of sustained success.

While LHP **Jake Marciano's** 6.08 ERA for Virginia Tech was unimpressive, his 71-to-18 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 60.2 innings suggests better days ahead. As Marciano continues to fill out, his stuff figures to tick up. Also competing for a rotation spot is RHP **Drew Whalen**, a cornerstone of Western Kentucky's standout staff. He pitched to a 3.53 ERA with 90 strikeouts in 81.2 innings.

Ryne Farber was a two-year standout at Texas State and is in line to take the reins at shortstop. His bat-to-ball skills are comfortably plus to go along with a polished approach and advanced swing decisions. 3B **Todd Clay** and 1B **Eddie Madrigal** are also primed for significant roles after enjoying standout seasons at Alabama-Birmingham and Saint Mary's.

Incoming freshmen RHPs **Justice De Jong** (No. 146) and **Ethin Bingaman** (165) have both flashed fastballs up to 95 mph, while SS **Ty Thompson** (257) has solid contact skills and is a plus runner.

7. FLORIDA STATE

Florida State had a nation-leading 11 players drafted, but coach Link Jarrett and his staff did an outstanding job of rebuilding the roster. On top of five top 100 transfers, FSU also has a solid recruiting class.

Ranked as the No. 5 transfer, former Florida Atlantic LHP **Trey Beard** is a potential top-two rounds draft pick who will compete for the Friday starter job. Former Oregon fireballing RHP **Cole Stokes** joins FSU after a bounceback 2025 campaign in which he showcased a plus fastball-slider combination. RHP **Brodie Purcell** was Southern California's most trusted bullpen arm last year.

Keep an eye on FSU recruits SS **John Stuetzer** (No. 341) and 3B **Kelvyn Paulino Jr.** (461). Stuetzer was a high-level, multi-sport athlete in high school who is a double-plus runner, while Paulino has solid bat speed with above-average raw power and the skills to play the hot corner.

Trey Beard brings his big arm to Tallahassee.

ANDY ALTENBURGER/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES (LACHENMAYER), BILL MITCHELL (BINGAMAN), MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (BEARD), EDDIE KELLY (WALLS), FREEK BOUW/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (MERCURIUS, TOIGO)

Brody Walls starred for McKinney Boyd High outside Dallas.

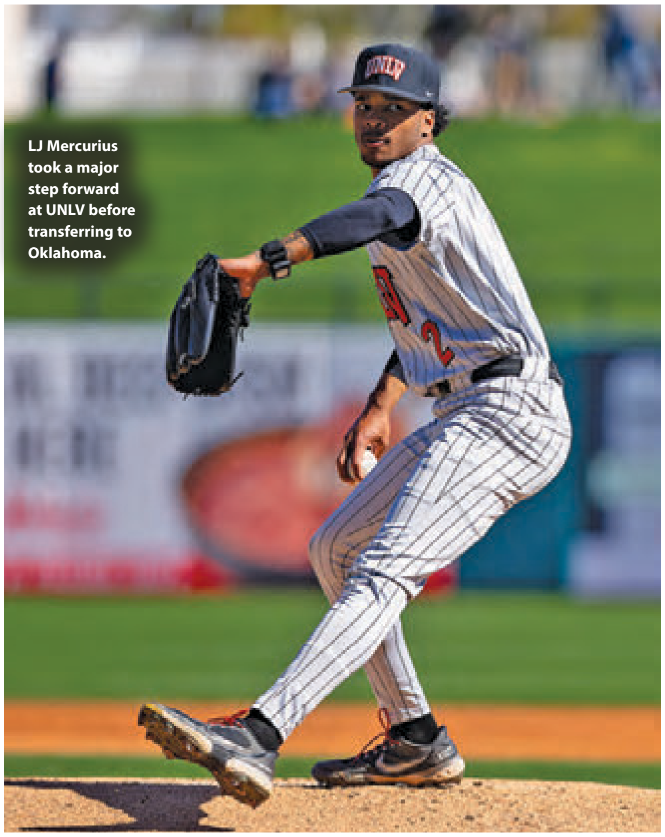
8. TEXAS

Jim Schlossnagle's first season in Austin was a success. He guided the Longhorns to a regular season SEC title in the school's first year in the conference. While Texas was bounced as regional host, the Longhorns wasted no time rebuilding their roster.

The big fish in Texas' portal class is former Notre Dame C **Carson Tinney**, a first-team All-American with plus power and an advanced defensive profile who will impact the game on both sides of the ball. OF **Aiden Robbins** enters the mix after hitting .422/.537/.652 with 20 stolen bases for Seton Hall.

It will be exciting to see what former Wake Forest LHP **Haiden Leffew** is able to accomplish under the tutelage of pitching coach Max Weiner. He racked up 59 strikeouts in 34.1 innings in 2025, and his plus, low-80s kick changeup generated an elite 72% miss rate.

Unsurprisingly, pitching is also the biggest strength of Texas' recruiting class. RHP **Brody Walls** (No. 160), LHP **Jack McKernan** (164), RHP **Brett Crossland** (180) and RHP **Cooper Rummel** (191) all ranked inside the top 200 on the final iteration of the BA 500 draft ranking. OF **Anthony Pack Jr.** (208) has impressive bat speed and an appealing blend of contact skills and plus speed.



LJ Mercurius took a major step forward at UNLV before transferring to Oklahoma.

9. OKLAHOMA

Coach Skip Johnson and the Sooners are fresh off another successful season that culminated in their fourth straight NCAA Tournament appearance. Led by a top transfer class, the Sooners head into 2026 with some buzz.

RHP **LJ Mercurius** turned in two successful years at Nevada-Las Vegas. He took a sizable step forward last season with 58 strikeouts in 53 innings. OF **Nolan Stevens** is a physical lefthanded hitter who has shown the ability to backspin the ball to all fields with plus power.

3B **Camden Johnson** is a top-of-the-order dynamo who's turned in double-plus run times. 2B **Cayden Brumbaugh's** skill set and versatility allow him to impact the game in myriad ways, while 6-foot-7 RHP **Mason Bixby** has flashed a mid-to-upper-90s fastball.

Oklahoma's recruiting class doesn't have the kind of depth that its transfer class does, but powerful 6-foot-6 OF **Alec Blair** (No. 71) was one of the best pure athletes in the 2025 class.

10. ARIZONA STATE

The Sun Devils last year made a regional for the first time since 2021 and had their most draft picks in a single season since 1981. Coach Willie Bloomquist and company had shortage of talent at their disposal, but they entered the offseason knowing there would be holes to fill.

OF **Dean Toigo** and SS **P.J. Moutzouridis** are the biggest transfer portal names, though 3B **Dominic Longo** and others also figure to compete for starting roles.

ASU returns a handful of exciting arms. In addition to their returners, the transfer trio of RHPs **Kole Klecker**, **Taylor Penn** and **Alex Overbay** all project to step into prominent roles.

The Sun Devils' recruiting class is led by SS **Finn Leach** (No. 268), a switch-hitter who has a balanced swing and generates plenty of hard line-drive contact. Though he has hit tool questions, 6-foot-5 OF **Hagen Wright's** raw power is immense.

New ASU Sun Devil Dean Toigo was Mountain West player of the year at UNLV.

American League

ORGANIZATION REPORTS

Baseball America
2025 MINOR LEAGUE PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

PAGE 41 The Yankees traded for Elmer Rodriguez-Cruz last offseason and developed him into one of the most effective pitching prospects of 2025.

● *Samuel Basallo endured early struggles at Triple-A before he settled into a routine that helped him get back on track and make his MLB debut for the Orioles.* **PAGE 39**

TONY FARLOW/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (RODRIGUEZ CRUZ), BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (BASALLO)

Bolte Improves Batting Consistency

Henry Bolte grew up in Northern California rooting for the Athletics, so it was meaningful to the Palo Alto High product when his hometown team drafted him in the second round in 2022.

Bolte's athletic ability and raw power made him stand out, complementing his speed and defense in center field.

"He gets a little streaky, but when you draft guys like that, you're betting on the ceiling," A's farm director **Ed Sprague** said.

"You're never sure where the floor is going to land, and the ceiling is as high as it gets in terms of his athleticism and all his tools that he comes with."

Bolte has steadily advanced through the ranks and reached Triple-A Las Vegas in late July. In 114 games this season, counting 80 with Double-A Midland, he batted .284/.385/.427 with nine home runs and 44 stolen bases.

Bolte entered the 2025 season with the development goal of getting into a hitting position that offered more adjustability and the ability to make more contact.

He got off to a strong start at Triple-A, posting a .838 OPS in 34 games, before having wrist surgery to end his season.

A's minor league hitting coordinator **Jim Eppard** complimented Bolte and how the 22-year-old approached this season.

"He's a kid who was playing high school baseball three years ago. So for him to already have hit Double-A and now on his way to Triple-A and playing there, I think we have a great player in the making," Eppard said in an interview with "A's Cast" in July.

Bolte looked strong in his at-bats and BP sessions this season. While his power output dipped year over year, his offensive consistency improved.

He hit .284 and maintained a strong walk rate of nearly 12% while reducing his strikeout rate by nearly five percentage points.

—*JESSICA KLEINSCHMIDT*

Adversity Prepares Basallo For MLB Debut

Samuel Basallo, on a fast track ever since he tore through three levels as an 18-year-old in 2023, found himself in a unique spot this year at Triple-A Norfolk.

His MLB debut was inevitable if he hit—which, after a slow start, he did. But he also had plenty to learn: about himself as a hitter, about catching and about competing.

Basallo reached Baltimore on Aug. 17 and swatted his first major league longball on Aug. 30 on the road at San Francisco. He believes his early-season struggles at Norfolk were a major factor in preparing him for his big league debut.

"Trusting and sticking to the process, that's something that I've struggled with at the beginning of this year at Norfolk. I got off to a bit of a bad start, went through a bad stretch, and wasn't feeling my best as well," Basallo said via team interpreter **Brandon Quinones**.

"Going through that prepared me for this, because going up, I knew there would be a bit of an adjustment period as well. I think that kind of helped me once I came up."

Basallo dealt with an elbow issue in spring training that impacted him early. Then a hamstring issue also slowed him. That period also allowed him to realize success wasn't something to take for granted.

Always the youngest at his level, and as the vanguard of the Orioles' renewed international scouting efforts, Basallo needed to be in Triple-A to soak in the wisdom of the likes of veteran **Vimael Machin**, who counseled Basallo through his early struggles.

Given he had a .990 OPS and 20 homers from May 1 until his callup, the waiting didn't slow him much. Basallo, who signed an eight-year contract extension days after his debut, produced a few big moments early in his MLB career, including a walk-off home run against the Dodgers.

—*JON MEOLI*

Tolle Rapidly Forges Path To Fenway

When the Red Sox drafted **Payton Tolle** in the second round in 2024, they saw a pitcher with intriguing physical and delivery traits as well as room for growth.

But even they underestimated how quickly the growth would occur—and how rapidly the lefthander would forge a path to Fenway in his first full professional season.

"His ability to learn and pick up things is just at a rate that I really haven't seen," Red Sox director of pitching **Justin Willard** said.

Tolle spent two years as an impact two-way player at Wichita State before concentrating heavily on the mound after transferring to Texas Christian for his junior year.

There, he featured a low-90s fastball that befuddled hitters thanks to a combination of his 6-foot-6, 245-pound stature, elite extension and low release height.

The Red Sox believed Tolle could become a midrotation starter with more power to his fastball and better secondary shapes—but no one expected his growth to be instant.

Lefthander Payton Tolle rose to MLB a year after being drafted by the Red Sox, his ascent a testament to his aptitude.

TOM PRIDDY/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

By spring training, Tolle overwhelmed hitters on the backfields while averaging 94 mph on his fastball. He also started leaning on a hard gyro slider.

He opened the season in High-A Greenville, where he ran a 50% whiff rate on his fastball and 38% strikeout rate to force a promotion after 11 starts. He then continued to dominate in the upper levels.

Tolle also made gains with his arsenal, added velocity, developed a cutter in August, showed promise with a kick changeup and reintroduced a curveball.

Across 91.2 minor league innings at three levels, Tolle had a 3.04 ERA and 37% strikeout rate. The Red Sox believe Tolle will be a key part of their rotation.

"This is hard for me to say, but this guy, he's a **Jonny Lester**-type guy to me," Portland manager **Chad Epperson** said. "Can't-miss, dominant big leaguer."

—*ALEX SPEIER*

Bonemer Checks All Boxes In Strong Debut

Cold-weather Michigan punches below its weight for producing baseball talent, as 19-year-old shortstop **Caleb Bonemer** can attest.

Unconvinced the light velocity he faced in games was preparing him for pro ball, Bonemer spent spare moments taking machine reps against higher velocity, even if it had him out in front at times in games.

That level of preparation helped prime Bonemer for an outstanding pro debut. He hit .281/.400/.458 in 96 games for Low-A Kannapolis and led the Carolina League with an .859 OPS.

He advanced to High-A Winston-Salem for 11 games. Between the levels, he totaled 12 home runs and 29 stolen bases.

"He's 19 but he feels like a guy who went to college," White Sox director of hitting **Ryan Fuller** said of Chicago's 2024 second-rounder. "He's physical, really strong and simple out there. That's what I love about him. It's really good at-bats. He knows the strike zone.

"When he hits, there's a lot of authority behind it."

Filled out and physical, Bonemer moved to third base at Winston-Salem for 2025 third-rounder **Kyle Lodise**. But improved reviews for his bat from scouts across the league suggest that Bonemer will survive an anticipated move off shortstop.

"A lot of people say they don't see my hands moving at all, and well, I feel like I'm moving them," Bonemer said. "I try to take my back pocket and turn it toward the pitcher, continuing to load that up, and when it's time to go, I just release and unload (my swing).

"With my hands, I set them with a slight hand pump—nothing too crazy—and make sure I get into those spots."

Bonemer had a vulnerability to changeups that will be tested at higher levels, but his adjustments helped him post a slightly above-average contact rate, while his swing decisions improved.

—JAMES FEGAN

Messick Continues Pattern Of Dominance

The Guardians' big league pitching staff is stocked with homegrown arms and others developed by the organization while still in the minor leagues.

Lefthander **Parker Messick** is no exception. The Guardians drafted him out of Florida State in the second round in 2022.

The 24-year-old was a consistent performer all season at Triple-A Columbus, where he recorded a 3.47 ERA in 20 starts with 119 strikeouts and 42 walks in 98.2 innings.

"What led to Parker's success this season was who he is as a competitor," Guardians assistant GM **James Harris** said. "He never backs down from a challenge."

Cleveland called Messick up on Aug. 20, and he delivered quality starts in four out of his first six MLB turns.

"He was awesome owning his development path, tapping into our coaches and group at Triple-A," Harris said. "That has continued into the big leagues with pitching coach **Carl Willis** and his team.

"We have confidence that Parker is going to do everything to maximize his potential and also be ready and prepared to compete."

Since being drafted by Cleveland, Messick has consistently attempted to build on his pitching arsenal. He doesn't overpower batters but effectively mixes a four-seam fastball, sinker, changeup, slider and curveball to keep batters off-balance.

"An offseason of physical work and owning patterns helped raise his velo floor," Harris said, "while in-season routines, commitment physically and developmental awareness has helped him maintain his power during the season."

Messick helped fortify the Guardians' rotation late this summer and is primed for a larger role next season.

—JIM INGRAHAM

McGonigle Uses 'Pure' Swing To Dominate

Shortstop **Kevin McGonigle** tends to make things look easy at the plate, but that doesn't mean his transition to professional baseball has always been seamless.

Continuous improvement helped prepare Carter Jensen for his best pro season and a hard-earned callup to the Royals.

Following a broken hamate bone in 2024, McGonigle suffered a high ankle sprain in the 2025 opener for High-A West Michigan, causing him to miss nearly two months.

That meant that McGonigle had some catching up to do. Good thing he always has had a knack for keeping things simple since the Tigers drafted him out of high school in the supplemental first round in 2023.

"(McGonigle) is a tremendous worker, an attention-to-detail type" a National League scout said. "I feel he plays above his size (a listed 5-foot-10) with a quality feel to hit and plus bat-to-ball skills.

"He has no fear facing lefthanded pitchers. I just love the respect he shows for the game and how he shows up daily to get better and try to help his team win a game."

Coming off the injured list, McGonigle returned to West Michigan at the end of May. From that point on, his production demanded attention.

"He has the best pure swing and approach in the minors," another NL scout said. "He always seems controlled in what he does during every at-bat."

With West Michigan, McGonigle slashed .372/.462/.648 with seven homers in 36 games.

"It's refreshing to see a young player with his tools," a third NL scout said. "(McGonigle) is a hitter with good hand-eye coordination and a steady defender with good feet and hands. His fundamentals are sound. He also has intangibles. All are hard to find in the game today, let alone at his age."

The Tigers promoted McGonigle to Double-A Erie in early July. He kept producing in the Eastern League and finished the year with a .305/.408/.583 batting line with 19 homers in 88 games.

—EMILY WALDON

Swing Tweaks Help Cole Make MLB Debut

Zach Cole was still in high school when Astros farm director **Jacob Buffa** first tried to recruit him.

Cole's talent stood out right away to Buffa, who at the time had a company that trained baseball players in St. Louis.

"I've always known that he's among the most talented players on any field he steps on," Buffa said. "That's always been true, and that will always be true."

The 25-year-old Cole exhibited that talent when he homered on the first pitch he saw in the big leagues.

The Astros called up the outfielder to make his MLB debut on Sept. 12 after he popped 19 homers and stole 18 bases in 97 games in the minor leagues this season, mostly for Double-A Corpus Christi.

The Astros drafted Cole in the 10th round in 2022 out of Ball State. A hamstring injury interrupted his progress this season, but his high strikeout rate was the biggest issue until he finally had a breakthrough when he altered his swing in June.

Buffa praised Corpus Christi hitting coach **Bobby Bell** and Astros minor league hitting coordinator **Aaron Westlake** for the work they did with Cole's swing.

"He changed his setup a bit, where his hands and bat started to allow him to be on time more consistently," Buffa said. "It's been tremendous. He came into the system already being one the best athletes that we've had in the system from Day One.

"You could tell there was a lot of talent there, and a lot of unproven talent."

In 82 games for Corpus Christi, plus 15 more for Triple-A Sugar Land, Cole batted .279/.377/.539 with a 35% strikeout rate. But in his final 55 minor league games, he hit .319 and slugged .628 with an improved 31% strikeout rate.

—JOSE DE JESUS ORTIZ

Jensen Reaches MLB After Years Of Growth

It would be easy to simply categorize **Carter Jensen's** season as a breakout for the 22-year-old catcher, especially with the Kansas City-area native ending the campaign with his first callup to the major league team he grew up following.

But really, his success stems from continuing to build on the growth he has exhibited steadily since the Royals drafted him in the third round in 2021.

Jensen split this season between Double-A Northwest Arkansas and Triple-A Omaha and batted .290/.377/.501 with 20 home runs in 111 games.

It wasn't just his offense that took a big step forward. According to a National League scout, Jensen took big steps forward with his defense behind the plate.

Throughout his career, Jensen has consistently drawn walks, resulting in high on-base percentages that were always countered by lower batting averages. A cursory look might indicate that his improvement was a matter of becoming more aggressive.

Not so, according to Royals farm director/field coordinator **Mitch Maier**.

"You're just seeing the natural development of a young hitter who had a really good feel for the strike zone and a really good feel to hit," Maier said.

". . . We didn't want him to get overaggressive and lose what he was really good at, which was controlling the strike zone."

DAVID DUROCHIK/DIAMOND IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES (JENSEN), LARRY GOREN/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (RODRIGUEZ)

Another key for Jensen was using the whole field instead of being pull-heavy. In past years, his pull rate would hover near 50%, but in 2025 it was 38%.

Other metrics that demonstrated Jensen's improvement were his average exit velocity, which jumped by 4.6 mph, and his zone-contact rate, which increased to nearly 87% at Triple-A.

"He's extremely mature with the way he goes about his business, his routines and his offseasons," Maier said. "As a young player at a demanding position, it's really helped him improve on both sides of the baseball."

—BILL MITCHELL

Rodriguez Produces From Beginning To End

Outfielder **Raudi Rodriguez** had little fanfare on Opening Day. He was a 19th-round prep pick in 2023 and was playing part time with Low-A Inland Empire.

By the end of season, he was the California League's top run producer.

The 22-year-old Rodriguez's breakout season finished with a league-leading 90 runs scored, 83 RBIs and 14 home runs, while his 38 stolen bases ranked fifth.

Showcasing his above-average power and speed tools, Rodriguez became the 20th player since 2006 to finish a minor league season with double-digit doubles (21), triples (14) and home runs along with 30 or more stolen bases.

Coming off a humdrum 2024 season in the Arizona Complex League, Rodriguez showed more swing consistency in 2025. He more consistently hit the ball hard at optimal angles, which boosted his performance and altered his long-term projection.

His value continued to increase while moving from right field to center field, where he was quick to adjust.

"He adapted to (center field) quickly," Inland Empire manager **Dave Stapleton** said. "He was able to run good and direct routes . . . His route efficiency and first step quickness were great."

"Raudi has the upside to be an everyday outfielder who impacts the game on both sides of the ball," Angels assistant GM **Joey Prebynski** said. "He has the speed and athleticism, and his reads and routes continued to get better."

Rodriguez slashed .404/.493/.614 over his final 30 games. He went 5-for-15 with three home runs in the Cal League playoffs to help lead the 66ers to a runner-up finish.

The Angels' Raudi Rodriguez went from part-time player to prospect with a new batting proficiency and new position.

"He has been on the same trajectory all through the season," Stapleton said. "He went through a week or so where maybe he's off, but that's more (full-season fatigue), but he was able to gear back up."

—TAYLOR BLAKE WARD

Healthy Jenkins Shines On Both Sides Of Ball

Walker Jenkins, who turns 21 in February, was the first Twins prospect in a decade to be promoted above Double-A during his age-20 season.

Adding to the degree of difficulty, Jenkins missed two months at the beginning of the season because of a high ankle sprain in his left foot.

But once Jenkins settled into playing every day at Double-A Wichita, the Twins' player development staff saw he was too talented for the level. He hit .309 with a .912 OPS in 52 games there, adding seven home runs and 11 stolen bases.

"He killed it at Double-A, and a lot of the underlying markers were really encouraging," Twins GM **Jeremy Zoll** said. "We wanted to make sure we gave him a challenge of Triple-A to end the year."

Jenkins, who has a lefty swing reminiscent of Hall of Famer **Joe Mauer**, posted a .286/.399/.451 slash line in 84 total games, mostly for Wichita and Triple-A St. Paul.

He showed improvement in different areas this year. He has one of the best contact rates in the organization, and he worked on taking more aggressive swings early in counts.

After hitting a combined nine homers over the last two seasons, Jenkins hit 10 this year. He had seven homers and 11 doubles in his final 44 games, which Jenkins partially attributed to better health.

"He's super strong," Zoll said. "He has the frame. For him, specifically, it was one of those things where it was like, 'We're not going to worry about (power) too much.' He has a great hit tool. We don't need to get too cute on trying to remake his swing or change his mechanics."

Jenkins, who missed two months last year with a hamstring strain, said this is the first time in a couple years he played without reservations. He had no concerns about aggravating a soft-tissue injury. It showed up in his defense, too.

"He's probably exceeded our expectations in center field," Zoll said. "His defensive instincts and his speed plays well out there."

—BOBBY NIGHTENGALE

Rodriguez-Cruz Shines With Six-Pitch Mix

Righthander **Elmer Rodriguez-Cruz** set one primary goal for this season, his first in the Yankees organization following an offseason trade, and proceeded to meet the challenge—and then some.

"One of my goals this year was to get to 100 innings, and thankfully I was able to get past that," Rodriguez-Cruz said. "That was one of the main goals, to stay healthy and get past 100 innings. That was the first time I've been past it."

The 22-year-old tossed 150 innings in a season he split between High-A Hudson Valley and Double-A Somerset, plus one Triple-A start. He struck out 176 batters, pitched to a 2.58 ERA and allowed a .192 opponent average. All four of those marks were among the best in the minor leagues.

"I feel really good. Even though it's been a long season, I've still got a lot left, and the arm has been feeling good," he said.

The Yankees acquired Rodriguez-Cruz from the Red Sox in December when they traded **Carlos Narvaez** to Boston.

Now, Rodriguez-Cruz appears to be a part of the Yankees' future, potentially a prominent one after he joined the Top 100 Prospects. He throws six pitch types, led by a mid-90s sinker that has approached 98 mph and includes a four-seamer, sweeper, curveball, splitter and gyro slider.

"He has that six-pitch mix, but he knows how to use it," Somerset pitching coach **Peter Larson** said, "and I think that's the separator for such a young guy."

The Red Sox drafted Rodriguez-Cruz in the fourth round in 2021 out of high school in Puerto Rico. He reached High-A in Boston's system in 2024.

Larson said the Yankees had Rodriguez-Cruz lean into a sinker to help combat righthanded hitters and fine-tune a sweeper that he had already been throwing.

"His ability to use all (his pitches) and attack each hitter accordingly," Larson said "I think it's a pretty elite trait that he's already showing. There's a lot to like with him."

—MIKE ASHMORE

Montes Mashes His Way Into MLB Picture

Lazaro Montes had something to prove coming into this season.

Could he continue to rocket through the Mariners' minor league system after a breakout 2024, when he hit 21 homers with 105 RBIs in 117 games at the Class A levels?

The answer was a definitive "yes."

Montes followed up with 32 home runs and 89 RBIs in 131 games between High-A Everett and Double-A Arkansas. He hit .241/.354/.504 and set a new personal standard for home runs and also with 83 walks.

"He had a great year," Mariners farm director **Justin Toole** said. "(Montes) kind of burst onto the scene these last couple of years with just the power, and the ball comes off his bat in a way that it doesn't for many people in the game of baseball."

Montes got off to a hot start for the AquaSox. The 6-foot-5, 210-pound lefthanded hitter led the Northwest League with 18 homers and 50 RBIs at the time he was promoted to Arkansas on June 23.

Montes hit .216 with 14 homers and a .762 OPS at Double-A, but with a higher level of competition and the Travelers' home being notoriously pitcher-friendly, Toole is happy with Montes' results.

"He's taking everything serious and trying to find ways to continue to improve," Toole said. "So as exciting as it is offensively, it's a total package of a guy who wants to get out, get better and become a better baseball player, not just a hitter. And anytime you have that, it's exciting."

If he keeps producing early next year, fans might not have to wait long to see him.

"If he continues to develop and continues to do things the way that he's done it, he's going to put himself in a good spot," Toole said. "And when that opportunity comes, you know, I'm pretty sure he'll be ready to take advantage."

—SHANE LANTZ

Hopkins Continues Growing As A Pitcher

Brody Hopkins played both ways as a college junior, but his professional position has been pitcher ever since the Mariners drafted him in the sixth round in 2023.

The righthander shined at Low-A for Seattle before the Mariners traded him to the Rays as part of the July 2024 **Randy Arozarena** deal. Hopkins kept succeeding at High-A last season and at Double-A Montgomery this season.

His 2.72 ERA and 141 strikeouts both ranked fourth in the Southern League. He pitched in the Futures Game, and he fired five shutout innings in his first playoff start.

"He just showed a lot of growth as a starting pitcher," Rays assistant GM **Kevin Ibach** said. "He was a guy who was a position player in college for a long time and has limited innings on the mound as a professional . . .

"So I think going to Montgomery this year, in a smaller league, you're facing a lot of the same competition over and over again, he was able to post every fifth day and make adjustments along the way—because the stuff is certainly there."

The Rays' Brody Hopkins checks boxes for stuff, athleticism and competitiveness. His Double-A results confirm as much.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

Hopkins has a strong pitch mix. The Rays are encouraged by his increasing pitchability, durability and results at Double-A.

He logged 25 starts and 116 innings this season and missed bats, though his walk rate of 12% was fifth-worst among Double-A pitchers with at least 100 innings.

"He can really spin the baseball," Ibach said ". . . but I think it's just being able to get ahead with his fastball or the cutter.

"Strike one has always been what we've been preaching to him, and I think he's done a good job throughout the year of really adapting to that mentality"

The Rays were well aware they were getting a superior athlete, still likely one of the best in their organization. What they learned in 2024 was the extent of his competitiveness.

"He really wants to win, really is hard on himself, and expects big things out of himself," Ibach said. "So you couple that athleticism with that mentality, and I think you have a really, really good starting pitching prospect on your hands."

—MARC TOPKIN

Freeman Earns Callup With Offensive Uptick

Cody Freeman didn't enter the season ranked among the Rangers' top 30 prospects, but the versatile 24-year-old ended it as a key contributor to a Texas team that battled for a wild card.

Freeman started games at six positions—every one but catcher and center field—this season between MLB and Triple-A Round Rock. Primarily a second baseman and third baseman, he added an upgraded offensive dimension and dwarfed his previous career highs in many offensive categories.

His .336 batting average led the Pacific Coast League. His .931 OPS ranked fifth. He hit 19 home runs and, counting his MLB time, topped 20 for the first time.

"It's nothing too much different than what I've done in the previous years," Freeman said. "It's just part of the development and part of the reason we have minor league levels. You try to strive each and every year, and each and every day."

The Rangers drafted Freeman in the fourth round in 2019 out of Etiwanda High in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., the same program that produced his older brother **Tyler**, a Rockies utility player. Despite his talent and bloodlines, Cody slipped in the draft partially because he is 5-foot-8.

He certainly stood tall this season and answered the call when Texas needed him.

Early in his pro career, Freeman played catcher as much as infield and made his first Cactus League appearances behind the plate in 2023. He focused on infield the past two seasons, and his bat has taken off.

He has noticed being more focused late in games, as opposed to having some mental and physical fatigue as a catcher. His strikeout rate improved drastically this year, falling to from 18% at Double-A to roughly 9% at Triple-A.

More than anything, the Rangers acknowledge Freeman as a winner. They love the way he plays the game and they praised him for infusing energy into a team that underachieved much of the season.

—JEFF WILSON

Yesavage Makes Five-Level Jump To MLB

Heading into this season, the Blue Jays designed a plan for 22-year-old righthander **Trey Yesavage** that left open the possibility of September innings in the majors.

Yesavage seized on that possibility by meeting each benchmark as he climbed four levels of the minor leagues to reach Toronto on Sept. 15 to make an electric five-inning, nine-strikeout MLB debut.

The Blue Jays drafted Yesavage 20th overall out of East Carolina in 2024. His rapid five-level ascension required everything to go right in his development, which is exactly what happened.

"There's been a lot of belief in him for a while," Blue Jays farm director **Joe Sclafani** said, "and it's more the way he answered the bell on the messaging from the jump. He asked good questions. He was on top of his routines. He learned and picked up different things.

"This dude's not fazed by anything. And he's one of the best, if not the best, competitors we have on the bump."

The numbers demonstrate that. Yesavage completed 98 innings over 25 outings for Low-A Dunedin, High-A Vancouver, Double-A New Hampshire and Triple-A Buffalo. His 160 strikeouts rank seventh-most among minor league pitchers. He allowed 54 hits and 41 walks.

The effectiveness of Yesavage's fastball/splitter/slider mix coming out of a uniquely high release point—plus his growth along the way—made it virtually impossible for the Blue Jays to not call him up.

"Being able to adapt to different situations and different hitters, being able to read swings," are areas in which Yesavage said he has made the biggest strides. "In college, I was having my pitching coach call most of my pitches for me, and now it's me and the catcher working together."

The careful management of Yesavage's workload means he arrived in the majors with no restrictions, offering a boost for a Blue Jays team pushing into the postseason.

—SHI DAVIDI

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PAGE 46 JJ Wetherholt hit the ground running in pro ball, hit his way to Triple-A and put himself on the MLB radar for 2026.

● *JR Ritchie returned from Tommy John surgery with crisp stuff and command that could put him on the fast track to Atlanta next season.* **PAGE 44**

EDDIE KELLY (WETHERHOLT), DANNY PARKER/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (RITCHIE)

Waldschmidt Evokes Lofty Comparison

Time after time, the coaches at High-A Hillsboro watched outfielder **Ryan Waldschmidt** fall behind in the count, battle to work it full and ultimately find his way on base, either with a hit or walk.

It reminded Hillsboro manager **Mark Reed** of another player who worked his way through the D-backs' system.

“We would say, ‘This is a Goldy at-bat,’ ” Reed said, referring to **Paul Goldschmidt**. “Waldy just manages his at-bats really well. He controls what he swings at and is able to foul off pitches and get to a count or get to a pitch that he could handle or do something with.”

Waldschmidt's ability to put together high-quality at-bats led to the best offensive season in the system. He hit .289/.419/.473 with 18 home runs in 134 games split between Hillsboro and Double-A Amarillo and posted a nearly even number of walks (96) as strikeouts (106).

“He knows what he's doing,” Amarillo manager **Javier Colina** said. “He has a plan when he walks to the plate.”

Waldschmidt, whom Arizona drafted 31st overall last year out of Kentucky, is reminiscent of Goldschmidt in another way: Both have repeatable, efficient righthanded swings with little wasted movement.

“He's kind of spread out a little bit,” Colina said. “I would say his load is simple. Minimized movements. He's a big kid. He's strong. He can drive the ball. He doesn't need to do that much to generate that power to drive the ball.”

And for as good as he was offensively this season, he might even have more in the tank.

“There's still more power to come,” Reed said. “He's going to learn how to get to the ball close to him and keep it fair down the left field line. There's probably a little more power to the right-center gap.”

—NICK PIECORO

Ryan Waldschmidt turned in the best season by a D-backs minor league hitter, led by his mature approach and power.

Ritchie Shines In First Full Season Back

The Braves have flooded their system with talented arms in recent years, hoping a couple of them can realize their upside.

Righthander **JR Ritchie's** ascension has moved him to the head of the pack.

The 22-year-old pitched superbly in his first full year distanced from having Tommy John surgery. Ritchie threw 140 innings across three affiliates, struck out 140 batters, posted a 2.64 ERA in 26 games and finished the season with Triple-A Gwinnett.

Along the way, he started the Futures Game in front of hometown fans in Atlanta.

The Braves drafted the Seattle native out of high school in the supplemental first round in 2022. After having TJS early in 2023, Ritchie returned to action in June 2024. Now, he is poised to make his MLB debut as soon as next season.

Atlanta chose Ritchie with the draft pick it acquired from the Royals in the teams' **Drew Waters** trade. Former Braves vice president of scouting **Dana Brown** said at the time he was surprised Ritchie was still available with the 35th pick.

The Braves drafted righthander **Owen Murphy** in the first round that year.

“(Murphy and Ritchie) were pretty close on our list,” Brown said, “but we had Murphy a little higher. So we were a little surprised.”

Ritchie's fastball velocity had topped around 98 mph when the Braves drafted him. He started getting closer to that mark again this season as he rebuilds strength. He hovered in the mid 90s and should be in his best form entering spring next year.

Ritchie's out pitch is his slider, and it will largely determine his ultimate effectiveness. The pitch looked crisp this year. He also throws a changeup.

Ritchie makes his mark with how consistently he attacks the strike zone. That could make him a key part of the 2026 rotation.

—GABE BURNS

Long Emerges Stronger From Struggles

First baseman **Jonathon Long** was the picture of consistency in 2025 at Triple-A.

The Cubs drafted Long in the ninth round out of Long Beach State in 2023. He reached Double-A last year and upped the ante as a 23-year-old this season by batting .305/.404/.479 and setting career highs with 20 home runs and 91 RBIs.

Cubs farm director **Jason Kanzler** pointed to three traits Long possesses that enhance his floor: his high walk rate, low strikeout rate and an ability to hit the ball hard, often in the air.

“Those three things give him a really good shot to be a very productive player,” Kanzler said. “And that's not even including the things that aren't really talked about with him, which is that he is a very good first baseman defensively.”

While his consistency became a staple of his performance, Long's June lull was his only extended blip in production. His .606 OPS that month came with just two extra-base hits but with 11 walks and 14 strikeouts in 25 games.

Reflecting on his June, Long said he emerged stronger from the struggles and learned how to fail in order to succeed.

“Obviously, you're not going to dominate the whole season," Long said. "You're going to go through peaks and valleys, and that was the first real time that things were just not going my way.

"You still have to show up to the ballpark every day and take every day as a new day, a new opportunity, and keep pushing through even when you can't see that light at the end of the tunnel."

Long's struggles helped him focus his mindset: "This is my time to struggle. It's not going to happen forever.”

—MEGHAN MONTEMURRO

Stewart Hones His Zone And Takes Off

A wrist injury suffered during the 2024 all-star break required surgery and cost **Sal Stewart** the second half of the season at High-A Daytona.

The Reds moved Stewart up to Double-A Chattanooga to begin this year, and the 21-year-old third baseman responded with his best pro season.

Stewart hit .308 through his first 56 games but had just three home runs. Then, everything began to come together in mid June, and he hit .310 with 17 homers in his final 62 games for Chattanooga and then Triple-A Louisville.

“Early on, I was kind of chasing, then I just had to hone in my zone,” Stewart said. “Once I did that, they had to come to me, and from there the power took off.”

Stewart made plenty of contact through the first two months of the season, but he wasn't drawing many walks. As that started to change in June, his power began to show.

Following Stewart's appearance in the Futures Game, the Reds promoted him to Triple-A, where he just kept hitting. He hit 17 of his 20 homers after June 12.

“He's a student of the game,” Reds senior director of player development **Jeremy Farrell** said. “As he's continued to grow and develop, he ‘s met the challenges in the minor leagues, and you can see that in the numbers.”

Stewart hit .309/.383/.524 with 20 homers and 17 stolen bases In 118 games at two minor league levels. The Reds called him up on Sept. 1 when rosters expanded from 26 players to 28.

He reached the majors three years after the Reds drafted him 32nd overall in 2022 with the first-round compensatory pick they added for the loss of **Nick Castellanos**, who signed with the Phillies as a free agent.

“It was the quality of at-bats that he continued to take in Double-A and Triple-A that put him on the radar for the big leagues,” Farrell said.

—DOUG GRAY

JOHN E. MOORE III/GETTY IMAGES (WALDSCHMIDT), MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES (MADE)

A lot was expected of the Brewers' Jesus Made this season. He cleared the bar and reached Double-A as an 18-year-old.

Maturity Helps Karros Rise To The Occasion

Third baseman **Kyle Karros** hit two home runs, the second a walk-off, on Opening Day for Double-A Hartford. He continued that trajectory and made his major league debut on Aug. 8 with the Rockies.

Karros earned MVP honors in the High-A Northwest League last year and won a minor league Gold Glove. He has a strong, accurate arm, nimble feet and moves well, particularly for someone who is 6-foot-5.

Karros was hitting .333 with a .960 OPS at Hartford when he fouled a ball off his right knee on May 2 and suffered a contusion. He rejoined Hartford on June 3.

"The injury kind of set him back a little bit," Rockies assistant farm director **Jesse Stender** said, "but he got back at it, forced his way up to Triple-A and obviously the rest is history now."

Karros hit .294/.399/.462 in 55 games for Hartford with four home runs. The Rockies promoted him in mid July to Triple-A Albuquerque, where he hit .306/.368/.500 in 16 games with two home runs.

Trading third baseman **Ryan McMahon** to the Yankees on July 25 created an opportunity for Karros, a fifth-round pick out of UCLA in 2023. His father, **Eric Karros**, had a long, productive MLB career and remains a hitting resource.

Through 34 games with the Rockies, Karros hit .232/.298/.295 with one homer. The Rockies expect that the 23-year-old will tap into the power he shows in BP.

A hard worker with leadership skills, Karros speaks Spanish well enough to converse with Latino players in their native language. He holds teammates and himself accountable.

"He's just a cut above," Stender said. "He's just very mature for his age, very advanced. Great self-awareness. Understands where he is, where he needs to get better, what he does well, how he can help the team.

"So a lot of (his attributes) are the intangibles to go along with being a plus defender and a guy who will continue to come into his own at the plate."

—*JACK ETKIN*

Well-Rounded Quintero Shows Wide Skill Set

Josue De Paula and **Zyhir Hope** played side by side at High-A Great Lakes and went to the Futures Game together. **Mike Sirota** put up a 1.068 OPS in 59 games at a pair of Class A stops but missed more than half the season with a knee injury.

But the outfielder who shined brightest from start to finish this season was 20-year-old center fielder **Eduardo Quintero**. He stood out by steadily refining the skills that prompted the Dodgers to sign him out of Venezuela in 2023 and move him from his amateur position of catcher to the outfield.

"Internally, we had him very high. I think he exceeded expectations," Dodgers GM **Brandon Gomes** said. "They loved the dude (in player development). Every challenge, every tweak they've given him he's taken it and made the adjustment."

At Low-A Rancho Cucamonga, Quintero slashed .306/.426/.533 and led the California League with 14 home runs, 73 runs scored and a .960 OPS at the time he was promoted to High-A. At Great Lakes, he still maintained an OPS over .800 as one of the youngest players in the league.

In 113 games he totaled 19 homers and 47 stolen bases while drawing 88 walks.

"He's shown good bat-to-ball, pretty good decision-making, really young for the level," Gomes said. "Shows power when you need it. Can hit balls to all fields. There's no one standout 80-grade tool. It's a bunch of really good components plus good makeup to bet on."

If those were all things the Dodgers expected from Quintero, he has also filled in some blanks with his ability to handle center field.

"In general, it's a rare commodity," Gomes said. ". . . I don't think he's a slam dunk center fielder, but I think it's a high probability that he's going to play a good center field."

—*BILL PLUNKETT*

Snelling Reunites With Former Pitching Coach

The Marlins acquired lefthander **Robby Snelling** in July 2024 as the key prospect in the trade that sent **Tanner Scott** to the Padres.

The following season, Miami hired **Rob Marcello**—who had worked with Snelling in the Padres organization—as pitching coach at Triple-A Jacksonville.

When the Marlins promoted Snelling to Jacksonville in July, the 21-year-old teamed up again with Marcello—and proceeded to go on his best run as a pro.

"I'm known to push people," Marcello said. "Nothing is good enough, and (Snelling) has taken it by storm."

The Padres drafted Snelling in the supplemental first round in 2022, going over slot to sign him for $3 million. He shined in his pro debut season of 2023, winning BA Minor League Pitcher of the Year honors.

Snelling scuffled through much of 2024 but found his footing in the Marlins organization late in the season. This year has been a different story.

Snelling struck out 166 batters, one of the highest totals in the minor leagues, while pitching to a 2.51 ERA across 136 innings. He walked 39 and allowed 10 home runs while making 14 starts for Double-A Pensacola and 11 more for Jacksonville.

From the day Snelling made his first Triple-A start on July 10, he had the top ERA (1.27) and most strikeouts (81) at the level.

Snelling's arsenal includes a four-seam fastball that averages 94.7 mph and tops out at 98 with extreme movement. His go-to secondary pitch is his curveball, which has shown improved power and spin since he arrived in Triple-A and has been up to 2,650 rpm.

Snelling also has amplified use of his changeup to combat righthanded batters.

"He lost the vertical movement on his fastball last year," Marcello said. "But he came back with that changeup and the return of his fastball.

"I think he can be a No. 2 (in a rotation) or even a No. 1."

—*WALTER VILLA*

Made Hits His Way To Double-A At Age 18

The bar was set incredibly high. **Jesus Made** cleared it.

The 18-year-old shortstop embarked on his first season playing in the U.S. and excelled at his first two stops at Low-A Carolina and High-A Wisconsin on his way to finish with playoff-bound Double-A Biloxi.

"We brought him over in January and he's 18 years old, and at that age you'd think there would be homesickness," Brewers senior vice president of player operations and baseball administration **Tom Flanagan** said.

"But the way he's adapted, soaked up the knowledge and the culture and avoided slumps, it's been a solid-plus year for him across the board.

"Just to be able to kind of validate last year, having a lot of accolades coming out of the (Dominican Summer League), and to build on that at three different levels this year—I just can't say enough about how well he's done."

Made spent the bulk of the season at Low-A before moving to High-A on Aug. 5 and Double-A on Sept. 9, the rare 18-year-old at Double-A. At the three levels, Made hit .285/.379/.413 with six home runs and 47 stolen bases in 115 games. He drew 67 walks against 108 strikeouts.

At Biloxi, Made responded with multi-hit outings in three of his first four games.

Made saw the bulk of his action in the field at shortstop while playing both second base and third base. He shared positions at Class A with fellow Dominican middle infielder and friend **Luis Peña**.

Made's ascent and success are reminiscent of **Jackson Chourio** in 2022.

"You hate to compare anybody because it's unfair," Flanagan said, "but you can't help it because of the success he's had. He's kind of earned the right to evoke those comparisons, for sure.

"Credit to him for pulling it off."

—TODD ROSIAK

Tong Adds Velocity To Deceptive Fastball

Jonah Tong started the fourth game of the season for Double-A Binghamton. The 22-year-old righthander ended it as a key member of the Mets' big league rotation, along with fellow callups **Nolan McLean** and **Brandon Sproat**.

At the point he was called up Aug. 29, Tong led the minor leagues with a 1.43 ERA, 179 strikeouts and a .148 opponent average. That neatly summarizes the level of dominance he displayed in 20 Eastern League starts plus two more for Triple-A Syracuse.

The Mets drafted Tong in the seventh round in 2022, signing him for slot value. He grew up in Canada but transferred to Georgia Premier Academy to be scouted.

The Mets were drawn to Tong's fastball metrics—especially its riding life—as well as his athletic delivery, one he modeled after **Tim Lincecum**. The former Giants ace appeared to jump at hitters with elite extension after an exaggerated loading of his weight on his back leg.

Tong checks a lot of the same boxes with his delivery. As he follows through, he tilts his torso dramatically to get to an overhand arm slot that helps him get true backspin and ride on his fastball.

Tong's fastball helped make him almost unhittable in the minor leagues. While he didn't pitch much in his first full season, he opened eyes in 2024 with 160 strikeouts and a 3.03 ERA over 113 innings at three stops, primarily High-A Brooklyn.

Tong upped the ante this season after adding velocity—his fastball now sits in the mid 90s—and mastering a Vulcan-grip changeup that gives him a plus secondary pitch. He also throws a high-70s curveball.

"When he gets his curveball going, he can have a lot of success with it," Binghamton pitching coach **Dan McKinney** said. "He generated quite a bit of whiff versus lefthanded hitters with it . . . He threw it more last year when his changeup was a lower-usage pitch.

"This year, his changeup has taken off, but I really like his curveball."

—MATT EDDY

The Phillies' Justin Crawford played to his strengths at Triple-A while continuing to mature and add loft to his swing.

Crawford Rises To Occasion At Triple-A

When the Phillies promoted prospect **Justin Crawford** to Triple-A Lehigh Valley to start the 2025 season, they wanted to challenge him.

The 21-year-old center fielder had put up solid offensive numbers the season prior, which he split between High-A and Double-A. And when Crawford headed to Lehigh Valley to take the next step in his professional career, he rose to the occasion.

In 112 games, Crawford hit .334 with a .863 OPS and a walk rate of 11.5%. His elite speed translated to 46 stolen bases.

"Justin's combination of talent and toughness has once again shown through in his elite performance," Phillies farm director **Luke Murton** said.

The Phillies drafted Crawford 17th overall out of high school in 2022. The lefthanded hitter has met the challenge at each level so far, and has shown the Phillies that he's ready to take the next step in his career.

But a crowded, platoon-heavy outfield on the Phillies has so far blocked him from a major league callup. The organization maintains that Crawford will need to play every day when that time does arrive, and there has not been room for that this season.

"We think he's ready to play at the big league level," Phillies president of baseball operations **Dave Dombrowski** said of Crawford. "We could bring him up. If we do bring him up, he needs to play a lot."

As Crawford waits for the call, he's been working on his game. Since the day the Phillies drafted Crawford, there have been questions about his power and groundball rate, which was 59.4% this season.

But Crawford has continued to add weight and muscle each season. Four of his seven homers this season came in August—one of which carried 400 feet.

"We're excited to see his continued growth," Murton said, "and look forward to the impact he'll make on our major league team in the near future."

—LOCHLAHN MARCH

Griffin Excels At Making Adjustments

Konnor Griffin went from High School Player of the Year to the No. 1 prospect in baseball in a matter of a year.

The run that Griffin went on was incredible. The 19-year-old shortstop hit .333/.415/.527 with 21 home runs and 65 stolen bases as he flew through three minor league levels in his first professional season.

"The credit goes to the kid," Pirates farm director **Michael Chernow** said. "He's obviously extremely talented. He has really high character and is a phenomenal worker."

"He's doing everything to maximize the physical gifts that he has, but he's a kid who wants to learn about the game of baseball. He asks great questions."

In his second game as a pro, Griffin went 0-for-4 with four strikeouts for Low-A Bradenton. He went down on strikes in 12 of his first 21 at-bats but was able to adjust and later dominate the Florida State League.

Chernow says Griffin's high aptitude helped him quickly climb to High-A Greensboro and finally Double-A Altoona. When an issue arose, he diagnosed it and attacked it to get back on track.

"He's physically gifted, and he understands where the challenges are, which allows him to make adjustments really quick," Chernow said.

Griffin also struggled in his first few games at Double-A, striking out in five of his first eight at-bats. Again, he identified the issue and quickly made adjustments and finished with a 23.5% strikeout rate in 21 games at the level.

As competition improved, Griffin continued to rise to the challenge. With the season winding down and the games piling up, he only got better. During the month of September, Griffin hit .359 and collected hits in nine of 10 games.

"I wouldn't say he's like a perfectionist," Chernow continued. "What I mean is he wants to be great, and there's no controllable stone unturned for him. He's going to attack whatever he needs to attack to get better every single day, and that's what he's shown us."

—ANTHONY MURPHY

Wetherholt Hits The Ground Running

It did not take much time for shortstop **JJ Wetherholt** to make an impression on the major league staff, and that was before even took a swing.

"You notice it pretty quickly into any conversation you have with him," Cardinals manager **Oli Marmol** said. "He has a certain poise to him and understanding of how to play the game. He loves the game. He is obsessed with the game."

Encouraged by what they saw from Wetherholt during spring training, the Cardinals' new player development group started him at Double-A Springfield. All he did was lead the team to a first-half Texas League division title.

When he jumped to Triple-A Memphis

MIKE CARLSON/MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES (CRAWFORD), BILL MITCHELL (ELDRIDGE)

at midseason, Wetherholt hit three leadoff home runs in his first two weeks and got even better from there. In 109 total games, he batted .306/.421/.510 with 17 home runs and 23 stolen bases to assert himself as the Cardinals' top prospect and top performer.

The seventh overall pick in the 2024 draft, Wetherholt played his first pro games not far removed from a hamstring injury that interrupted his draft year at West Virginia.

The impression he made wasn't the only thing quick. With health, his game could be too.

"It's a lot more fun when you know you can just put your foot on the gas, and I don't have to take anything off," Wetherholt said. "That's been a ton of fun. I'd still like to utilize my legs a little bit more.

"But I think, for me, having that rebound—that first full year after having a significant injury and not having a ton of rest. That's something I'll continue to build on, (to) become a better basestealer."

Wetherholt spent most of the season playing shortstop. Toward the end of the summer he saw time at third base, and the Cardinals played him occasionally at second base, which could be his long-term position.

—**DERRICK GOOLD**

Mendez Proves His Stuff Plays At Double-A

The Padres signed Dominican shortstop **Victor Acosta** and Venezuelan outfielder **Samuel Zavala** as the headliners of their 2021 international signing class.

Both have since been traded to bolster San Diego's big league roster.

The Padres also signed Dominican righthander **Miguel Mendez** in 2021. Now, the 23-year-old stands as the organization's minor league player of the year in a season in which San Diego traded a number of its top prospects, including **Leo De Vries**, **Boston Bateman** and **Braden Nett**.

Before hitting a wall at Double-A San Antonio, Mendez worked to a 1.73 ERA over 72.2 innings as he rose from Low-A Lake Elsinore to High-A Fort Wayne. He didn't allow an earned run in 24 July innings for Fort Wayne and then threw six more scoreless frames, striking out 11, in his Double-A debut on Aug. 7.

While Mendez's performance unraveled afterward, he showed that his improved stuff would play at the upper levels. He finished with a 3.22 ERA and 1.22 WHIP in 95 innings, with 118 strikeouts and 45 walks.

"I'm not surprised personally," Padres vice president of amateur and international scouting **Chris Kemp** said. "The last couple of years, you could see the arm talent. He's a really smart kid, a kid who's coachable and makes adjustments.

"When you give him something to do, he's wired to do it the right way."

Mendez had only been pitching for about six months when Padres scouts first discovered him touching 91 mph while training in Bani, on the south side of the Dominican Republic. He signed for $10,000 because he was already 18 years old and inexperienced on the mound.

Mendez's velocity jumped to 94-95 mph in 2023, and earlier this year he touched triple digits in a Midwest League game that Kemp was scouting. He pairs his heat with a tight, upper-80s slider and a developing 88-91 changeup with sink and fade.

While his 11% walk rate remains high, it is improved from past seasons, as is his zone rate.

—**JEFF SANDERS**

The Giants' Bryce Eldridge adapted to upper-level pitching while honing his defense in another powerful season.

Eldridge Impresses With All-Fields Power

Bryce Eldridge entered the 2025 season with expectations perhaps even larger than his 6-foot-7, 240-pound frame.

And though the lefthanded-hitting first baseman didn't enjoy smooth sailing throughout, he produced well enough for Giants executive **Randy Winn** to call Eldridge's season "overwhelmingly positive."

Eldridge spent the bulk of the season with Triple-A Sacramento. He hit .260/.333/.510 with a system-high 25 home runs in 102 games, missing three weeks with a hamstring injury.

He began the season at Double-A Richmond, was promoted to Sacramento in early June and then received the call to San Francisco on Sept. 15.

The 2023 first-round pick from Madison High in Vienna, Va., hit 23 homers over four levels last season, when he also was the organization's POY.

Last season was Eldridge's first playing first base—and defense is one area where Winn has seen strong progress.

"He looks a lot more comfortable," Winn said, specifically referencing Eldridge's ability to start a 3-6-3 double play and his improvement picking throws out of the dirt.

In his first 10 games with Sacramento, Eldridge went 5-for-37 (.135) with two homers and 15 strikeouts. Winn said Eldridge's struggles initially with the River Cats likely stemmed from a 20-year-old adapting to Triple-A pitching.

"I think he pressed a little bit," Winn said. "He was trying to do too much too early, and I think he's learning that mental side of how to take an at-bat."

That mental approach includes being willing to send a pitch on the outer part of the plate to the opposite field.

"He's not just a pull guy," Winn said. "He hits the ball equally far to left field as he does right field."

Rafael Devers possesses similar power to all fields. The Giants acquired Devers from the Red Sox in June and used the lefthanded hitter mainly as a first baseman and DH.

—**STEVE KRONER**

Clemmey Finishes Strong At Double-A

As a 20-year-old pitching in Double-A, lefthander **Alex Clemmey** quickly ran into adversity by getting hit hard in his first three starts for Harrisburg.

"He had to change his plan of attack," Double-A Harrisburg pitching coach **Rigo Beltran** said. "He couldn't pitch to the middle of the plate like he had when he dominated in A ball."

Clemmey went through a series of drills and made small tweaks to his delivery. He focused on using his 92-96 mph fastball, sinker, slider and changeup at the right times and less hittable areas.

The results showed in his final three starts for Harrisburg when he had a 2.04 ERA, .177 opponent average and 0.91 WHIP.

That strong finish gave Clemmey an overall 3.47 ERA with 136 strikeouts and 73 walks in 116.2 innings between High-A Wilmington and Double-A.

The 6-foot-6 Clemmey stands out for both his raw stuff and the resiliency he showed as one of the youngest pitchers in the Eastern League.

"You have to wait at least a couple of games before you can get aggressive with adjustments," said Beltran, a lefthander who pitched for four major league teams over five seasons. "I felt like he was in a good spot during spring training, but he had gotten away from that.

"Now, he's in a spot where he's able to make in-game adjustments."

Clemmey was a second-round pick of the Guardians in 2023 out of Bishop Hendricken High in Warwick, R.I. He came to the Nationals in the 2024 trade that sent outfielder **Lane Thomas** to Cleveland.

Beltran said Clemmey's fastball and sinker were his most Double-A-ready pitches when he joined the Senators. Clemmey's slider is also a plus pitch—or at least the good version of it is.

"His slider is his best pitch, but it's also his worst pitch," Beltran said. "It's just that when he flies open and throws it in the wrong spots, it can really get hit. That's one of the things he's working hard at improving."

—**LACY LUSK**

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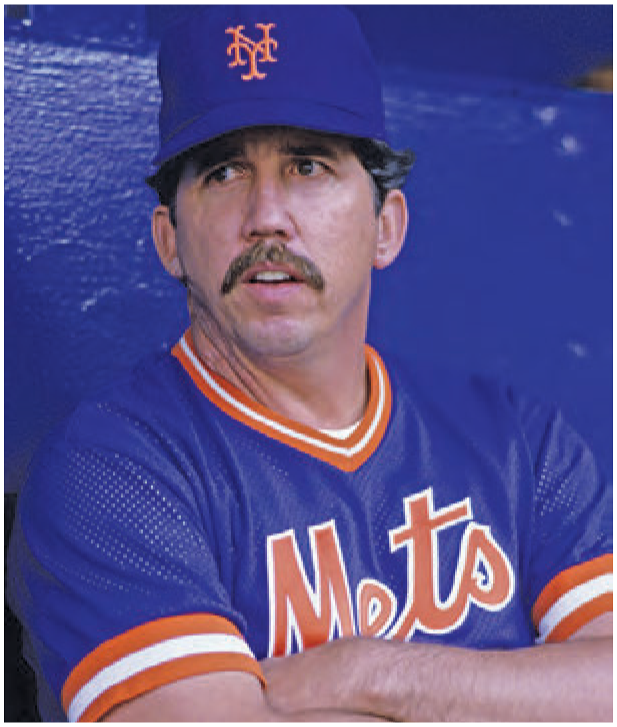
In Memoriam

DAVEY JOHNSON WON AS BOTH A PLAYER AND MANAGER



RONALD C. MODRA/GETTY IMAGES

Davey Johnson had a front-row seat to perhaps the most innovative manager in history when Earl Weaver took the helm in Baltimore midway through the 1968 season. Johnson himself would later join Weaver as one of the most successful skippers of all-time.

Unlike Weaver, Johnson had a decorated big league playing career that saw him make four all-star teams, win three Gold Gloves at second base and win two World Series rings before he became a manager.

Johnson's pro baseball journey began when the Orioles signed him in 1962 following one season at Texas A&M. He became the Orioles' regular second baseman in 1966 as a 23-year-old after the club traded Jerry Adair in June. He hit .257 with seven home runs in 501 at-bats but shined defensively and finished third in American League Rookie of the Year voting.

The 1966 Orioles won the World Series with future Hall of Famers Frank Robinson, Brooks Robinson and Luis Aparicio in their primes and young stars Jim Palmer, Dave McNally, Boog Powell, Paul Blair and Johnson on their way up.

The best was yet to come for Baltimore. The 1969–71 Orioles won the AL pennant each year, posting 109 wins in 1969 and defeating the Reds in the 1970 World Series. The Orioles' three-year stretch is one of the most dominant of the expansion era, and during it Johnson trailed only Joe Morgan in WAR among second basemen.

Johnson lost playing time to top prospect Bobby Grich down the stretch in 1972 and was traded to the Braves that offseason. In a much friendlier Atlanta home park in 1973, a 30-year-old Johnson smashed 43 home runs, 42 of them while in the lineup at second base. That tied Rogers Hornsby for the single-season record for homers by a second baseman, one that has not been surpassed.

Johnson's production fell off in 1974, then he spent two years in Japan and returned to the U.S. in 1977, playing part-time for two seasons before retiring.

The Mets hired Johnson to manage their Double-A Jackson affiliate in 1981. He moved to Triple-A Tidewater in 1983 and then up to New York in 1984. As good as he was as a player, Johnson is most famous for his time as Mets manager.

In seven seasons in Queens, he guided the Mets to a .588 winning percentage, including 108 wins and a World Series championship in 1986. From 1984 to 1990, the Mets had 666 wins, the most in MLB.

What distinguished Johnson as a manager was his embrace of data and creativity as well as his reputation as a player's manager, which often put him at odds with ownership—in New York and beyond.

Johnson managed the Reds from 1993–95, winning the NL Central in '95. He managed the Orioles in 1996 and '97, advancing to the AL Championship Series both times. He led the Dodgers in 1999 and 2000.

He managed the U.S. team at the 2008 Olympics and 2009 World Baseball Classic, setting the stage for his next gig. The Nationals hired Johnson in June 2011. He won NL East division titles the next two seasons and retired after the 2013 season.

Johnson led the Mets, Reds, Orioles and Nationals to the playoffs, just as Billy Martin led four different teams to October. Only Dusty Baker, with five, has a higher total.

Johnson managed one World Series champion and six total playoff teams—just as Weaver had on both counts—while finishing with a .562 winning percentage that ranks 15th highest among managers with at least 1,000 games.

Johnson died on Sept. 5 in Sarasota, Fla. He was 82. ■

Roy Clark

When the Braves drafted a home-state Georgia high school player under scouting director Roy Clark, they often struck gold.

Examples include Adam Wainwright in 2000, Jeff Francoeur and Brian McCann in 2002 and Jason Heyward in 2007.

Clark served as Atlanta scouting director from 2000 to 2009. The Braves hired him as an area scout in 1989. He worked his way up to crosschecker and then scouting director before leaving to become the Nationals' assistant GM in 2010.

Clark returned to the Braves in 2015 as a special assistant and senior advisor to scouting director Brian Bridges. The duo's 2015 draft is the most notable for yielding Austin Riley and Michael Soroka.

Clark died on Aug. 22 in Marietta, Ga. He was 68. ■

Diego Segui

Cuban righthander Diego Segui pitched for 15 seasons in the major leagues, winning the 1970 American League ERA title. He died on July 24 in Kansas City, Kan. He was 87.

Segui pitched for six MLB franchises, primarily the Athletics in both Kansas City and Oakland. He began his MLB career in 1962, working mostly as a starter. By 1972 he entered his mid 30s and transitioned to journeyman reliever status. He was famous for throwing a forkball.

Segui made 639 career appearances, 171 of them starts, and recorded a 3.81 ERA in 1,807.2 innings. He pitched from 1962 until 1977, ending with the Mariners in their inaugural season.

His son David Segui was a switch-hitting first baseman who logged 15 MLB seasons. ■

Nolan McLean debuted on Aug. 16 and quickly became a reliable Mets starter.

BENJAMIN B. BRAUN/GETTY IMAGES

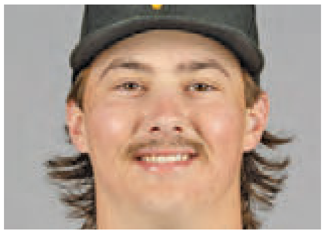
MLB Debuts

SIGNING SCOUTS FOR NEW MAJOR LEAGUERS

MLB DEBUTS WITH THEIR SIGNING SCOUTS

We highlight the scouts who signed this year's major league debuts, with this installment covering the period Aug. 16 to the end of the season.

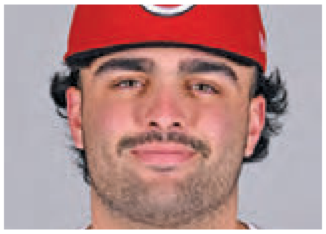
Player, Pos.	Debut	Team	Signing Scout(s)
Dylan Beavers, OF	Aug. 16	Orioles	Scott Walter
Nolan McLean, RHP	Aug. 16	Mets	Scott Thomas
Samuel Basallo, C	Aug. 17	Orioles	Michael Cruz/Gerardo Cabrera
Nathan Church, CF	Aug. 17	Cardinals	Chris Rodriguez
Nolan Hoffman, RHP	Aug. 18	Phillies	Austin Wates (Mariners)
Maximo Acosta, 3B	Aug. 18	Marlins	Rafic Saab/Jhonny Gomez (Rangers)
Parker Messick, LHP	Aug. 20	Guardians	Matt Linder
Joel Peguero, RHP	Aug. 21	Giants	Daniel Santana (Rays)
Bubba Chandler, RHP	Aug. 22	Pirates	Cam Murphy
Jhostynxon Garcia, OF	Aug. 22	Red Sox	Rollie Pino/Eddie Romero
Drew Sommers, LHP	Aug. 22	Tigers	Brian Oliver (Rays)
Carson Williams, SS	Aug. 22	Rays	Jaime Jones
Will Banfield, C	Aug. 23	Reds	Christian Castorri (Marlins)
Zach Maxwell, RHP	Aug. 23	Reds	Jerel Johnson
John Rooney, LHP	Aug. 24	Astros	Paul Murphy (Dodgers)
Brian Van Belle, RHP	Aug. 24	Rays	Willie Romay (Red Sox)
McCade Brown, RHP	Aug. 24	Rockies	Scott Corman
Taylor Rashi, RHP	Aug. 28	D-backs	Brad Cameron (Giants)
Jimmy Crooks, C	Aug. 29	Cardinals	Pete Parise
Cesar Prieto, 2B	Aug. 29	Cardinals	Koby Perez (Orioles)
Jonah Tong, RHP	Aug. 29	Mets	Marlin McPhail
Payton Tolle, LHP	Aug. 29	Red Sox	Chris Reilly
Mason Barnett, RHP	Aug. 30	Athletics	Will Howard (Royals)
Cam Devanney, 3B	Aug. 31	Pirates	Taylor Frederick (Brewers)
Andrew Alvarez, LHP	Sept. 1	Nationals	Bryan Byrne
Sal Stewart, 1B	Sept. 1	Reds	Andrew Fabian
CJ Stubbs, C	Sept. 1	Nationals	Tim Costic (Astros)
George Valera, RF	Sept. 1	Guardians	Jhonathan Leyba/Domingo Toribio
Mitch Farris, LHP	Sept. 2	Angels	Billy Best (Braves)
Hayden Harris, LHP	Sept. 2	Braves	Alan Butts
Carter Jensen, C	Sept. 2	Royals	Matt Price
Rolddy Muñoz, RHP	Sept. 2	Braves	Carlos Sequera
Jayden Murray, RHP	Sept. 4	Astros	David Hamlett (Rays)
Harry Ford, C	Sept. 5	Mariners	John Wiedenbauer
Christian Roa, RHP	Sept. 6	Marlins	Mike Partida (Reds)
Brandon Sproat, RHP	Sept. 7	Mets	Brett Campbell
Nick Raquet, LHP	Sept. 8	Cardinals	Bobby Myrick (Nationals)
Connelly Early, LHP	Sept. 9	Red Sox	Wallace Rios
Zach Cole, RF	Sept. 12	Astros	Scott Oberhelman
Denzer Guzman, SS	Sept. 13	Angels	Domingo Garcia
Cody Laweryson, RHP	Sept. 13	Twins	John Wilson
Carson Ragsdale, RHP	Sept. 14	Orioles	Bryce Harman (Phillies)
Bryce Eldridge, 1B	Sept. 15	Giants	John DiCarlo
Trey Yesavage, RHP	Sept. 15	Blue Jays	Coulson Barbiche
Rafael Flores, C	Sept. 17	Pirates	Dave Keith (Yankees)
Dom Hamel, RHP	Sept. 17	Mets	Gary Brown
Philip Abner, LHP	Sept. 19	D-backs	Matt Mercurio
Cole Wilcox, RHP	Sept. 19	Rays	Tyler Stubblefield (Padres)
Petey Halpin, CF	Sept. 20	Guardians	Carlos Muniz
Hunter Barco, LHP	Sept. 23	Pirates	Cam Murphy
Austin Pope, RHP	Sept. 25	D-backs	Dennis Sheehan
Jose Corniell, RHP	Sept. 28	Rangers	Francisco Rosario (Mariners)



Bubba Chandler averaged 99 mph on his four-seam fastball, immediately becoming one of MLB's hardest-throwing starters.

Lefthander Connelly Early tied a Red Sox franchise record when he struck out 11 Athletics batters in his MLB debut.

In four of his first seven starts, Parker Messick went at least six innings and allowed one or zero runs.



Sal Stewart amplified his power production in the minors and reached MLB three years after the Reds drafted him out of high school.

Drafted 20th overall last year, Trey Yesavage climbed four minor league levels to make his MLB debut on Sept. 15. He struck out nine.

Tigers top prospect Kevin McGonigle hit .300, compiled more walks than strikeouts and got to more power than ever before. It wasn't enough to win Minor League Player of the Year in a crowded prospect crop.

MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

PERSPECTIVE

FARM FRESH

The 2025 season served up several prospects with minor league seasons worth celebrating

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Farmers don't get to choose the weather. Whether it rains all summer or the soil dries out and cracks, harvest time comes and the silos are either filled or left near empty.

When it comes to picking our season-ending awards, we are a bit like farmers. We cannot control whether it's a bumper crop or a fallow period.

We choose a Minor League Player of the Year and, since 2022, a Minor League Pitcher of the Year. That's true whether it's a year overflowing with top prospects having standout seasons, or one in which no one clearly stood out. Some years we have a bounty of choices, some years we face slim pickings.

Readers, this year the silos are overflowing.

This was one of those years when multiple prospects were worthy of the Minor League POY award. In the end, we felt like we had a clear choice, but there were plenty of other worthy candidates who in other seasons could easily have taken home the hardware.

In many years, Tigers shortstop Kevin McGonigle would have been a slam-dunk choice. He turned 21 late in the season while showing off his polished hitting ability by batting .305/.408/.583 with 19 home runs in 88 games, the final 46 at Double-A Erie. He knows the strike zone better than some of the umpires, as his 59-to-46 ratio of strikeouts and walks attests.

Notably, McGonigle began to grow into his power. In his standout 2024 season, spent mostly at Low-A, he hit just five homers in 74 games.

Here is a perfect encapsulation of why McGonigle is one of the best overall prospects: If you surveyed evaluators about the best pure hitter in the minors, the lefthanded hitter is likely to have his name on the most ballots.

As good as his season was, Pirates top prospect Konnor Griffin's was even better.

The 19-year-old Griffin was younger and less experienced than McGonigle. He finished at the same level, Double-A. Griffin's performance was equally excellent, but he did it for a full season, while McGonigle missed a month.

Defensively, Griffin is a plus center fielder, but that feels like a waste because he's also a plus defender at shortstop. His arm is plus-plus, allowing him to make plays many shortstops cannot consider. He's also sure-handed and reliable. Griffin committed just seven errors at shortstop in 89 games, making him one of three teen shortstops with at least 75 games at the position and fewer than 10 errors. Franklin Arias of the Red Sox and George Lombard Jr. of the Yankees are the others.

Griffin also has standout speed that led to 65 stolen bases in 78 attempts.

Most importantly, Griffin addressed the one big concern he faced coming into pro ball—his hitting ability—and turned it into a strength. Griffin's .333 average is the best by a teenager in the full-season minor leagues since 2018, when Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit .382.

Griffin was wonderfully consistent. He hit .328 or better at all three stops from Low-A to Double-A. His strikeout rate didn't climb and his walk rate didn't dip significantly as he was promoted. His exceptional season also included 21 home runs, giving him a rare combination of power and speed production for a teenage prospect.

It's good we have a Minor League Pitcher of the Year award these days. A few years ago we realized the reduction in minor league pitchers' workloads made it unlikely that a pitcher could ever again win the POY award.

In the past 20 years, the only pitchers to win our POY award were Jeremy Hellickson in 2010 and Blake Snell in 2015.

This year's Pitcher of the Year is Mets righthander Jonah Tong. While it's hard to argue that his 113.2 minor league innings outweigh Griffin's 563 plate appearances, his season had a strong case as the most impressive performance of the year.

Baseball America has tracked the overall minor league leaders in every season since 1993. In that time, never before has a pitcher led the minors in ERA (1.43) and strikeouts (179). Tong did that and also led in opponent average (.149), strikeout rate (40.5%) and K-BB% (29.9). He had to settle for No. 2 in WHIP at 0.92.

Tong actually had a slightly rocky April. He gave up seven earned runs in his first three starts for Double-A Binghamton. From then on, he starred every time he took the mound. He didn't allow three runs again in an outing again over his final 19 minor league starts. His 10 scoreless starts outnumbered his six one-run outings and his two two-run starts.

Tong's 113.2 innings just barely edged over the line to qualify for the ERA title because he was called up at the end of August to play a key role in the Mets' playoff push.

Before that, Tong had spent most of the season at Double-A, and the qualifying threshold at Double-A is 109 innings. He made two additional starts for Triple-A Syracuse before jumping to the majors, and the Triple-A qualifying number is 120 innings, which equates to .8 innings per team game played. Average it out, and he qualifies—but just barely.

As far as dominating minor league pitching performances in 21st century, Tong's season ranks with Justin Verlander in 2005, when he pitched to a 1.29 ERA in 118.2 innings; Cristian Javier in 2019, when he led the minors with a 1.74 ERA and .130 opponent average; and Josh Beckett in 2001, when he led the minors with a 1.53 ERA and .170 opponent average.

Verlander's ERA and Javier's opponent average are the best overall marks since 1993—and maybe longer. We just can't verify that.

McGonigle's season was special. Tong had a year for the record books. And Griffin's breakout season is one anyone who saw him play in person will remember for decades to come.

It was a great year for anyone who loves seeing great prospects provide exceptional performances. ■

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